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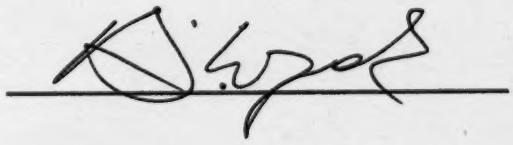

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Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Philosophical Aspects of the Tragic Subject: Its Evolution and Contemporary Dramatic Practice* submitted by Kristof Jacek Kozak in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature.

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Abstract

This dissertation challenges the presumption of the death of tragedy from a philosophical perspective and illustrates the survival of the genre in contemporary forms of tragedy.

Beginning with an analysis of Aristotle's *Poetics*, the argument traces the influence exerted by the Aristotelian tenets of tragedy. While I demonstrate the manner in which the history of tragedy in the West has emerged in light of this foundational treatise, I situate the importance of the inception of a post-Cartesian subject that became key to both philosophical reflections on human subjectivity and considerations about the possibility of representing tragic subjects in drama. This intertwining of philosophy and artistic representation is particularly pronounced in German Idealist thought that developed a philosophy of tragedy and established the subject as the essence of the genre. Critiques of Idealism inevitably led to the claim of the genre's death.

These developments in the history of tragedy and conceptions of human subjectivity are pinpointed through a critical analysis of Hegel's idealist conceptualizations of tragedy, followed by examinations of new visions introduced by Hebbel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Lukács that culminated in Modernist eradications of the subject, best demonstrated in Beckett's plays.

Despite the institutionalization of the subject's disappearance in poststructuralist hypotheses, theoreticians like Lévinas and Zima found a new basis for the self-constitution of the subject. I show how Lévinas's ethical and Zima's dialogical theories

lay the groundwork for a post-deconstructive subject that can be found in contemporary tragedies whose central conflicts are at once unavoidable and irresolvable.

For a demonstration of my argument I turn to four contemporary tragedies, representing different national literatures (France, Canada, Britain and the United States) and tragic traditions: Bernard-Marie Koltès's *Roberto Zucco* (1988), Sharon Pollock's *Doc* (1984), David Greig's *Europe* (1994), Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991). The analysis of these plays focuses on the level of subjectivity their characters attain. The characters are read in light of the different philosophical formulations of the subject discussed in the theoretical part of the dissertation. Both the theoretical and the literary analyses prove that tragedy exists in contemporary dramatic works.

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With regard to the topic itself, I am immensely indebted to Professors Peter V. Zima, who encouraged my curiosity at the beginning of this lengthy process, and Marvin Carlson whose deeply appreciated electronic correspondence encouraged me and reestablished my belief in the necessity of the contemporary investigation of the topic of tragedy.

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For the final appearance of the text I owe my gratitude to Mrs. Lorrie Kostelyk who was tireless in checking the dissertation for the idioms I unintentionally smuggled into English from my native Slovenian, as well as to Mr. David Clyburn who selflessly helped me to polish up my acquired linguistic skills.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The main point of interest in my dissertation, *Philosophical Aspects of the Tragic Subject: Its Evolution and Contemporary Dramatic Practice*, is the philosophical concept of the subject and its employment in the literary genre of tragedy. No contemporary discussion of tragic dramas can be relevant without the inclusion of the topic of subjectivity. In this thesis I analyze the present-day articulations of the subject and discuss how the subject revives the tragic genre. Considering that both concepts of tragedy and the subject are part of lively scholarly debates, I hope to contribute to them by proving that the concept of subject still can be theoretically conceived as universal and, consequently, be used as the very foundation for contemporary tragic plays. In contrast to current scholarship, I argue that the ancient genre of tragedy, having undergone transformations through time, has indeed survived and is today an important and essential part of dramatic production.

My interest in tragedy stems from its long and well-established tradition in scholarship, dating back to Aristotle, and numerous dramatic representations that are affiliated with the genre. I was struck by both the quantity, in terms of the sheer numbers of works, and the quality of the scholarship in the last two hundred years, particularly during the period of German Idealism that represents so far the final and essential phase of development in the scholarship on tragedy and a parallel flourishing of the romantic currents in art. This also was the time when, according to Peter Szondi, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling laid the foundation for what came to be known as the "philosophy of tragedy" (cf. page 17). Yet, despite this important stage in the history of tragedy, certain developments in philosophical thought and shifts in paradigm, which I shall elucidate in the first Chapter, have led to the proclamation of the death of tragedy.

Tragedy was conceived in antiquity as an artistic representation of human suffering, an essential constituent part of our lives. Even though the theoretical understanding of tragedy has evolved, suffering still exists today. Therefore, even if the ways of exposing suffering and the conceptual approaches to it have changed, tragedy has continued its existence.

Tragedy as a genre has an extremely long and illustrious history. Theorists have analyzed it from many and sometimes opposing points of view. By and large these views can be categorized as representing two trends: either they endorse the Aristotelian theory without giving any consideration to contemporary tragedies, or they focus on current dramas without any reference to the past. Unfortunately, I discovered the exclusivist stances of both groups to represent the important majority of scholarship. It would be extremely difficult to return to these past debates in order to reclaim the genre as a whole. Instead I intend to investigate what I consider the fundamental element of the tragic genre, i.e. the subject, and trace the changes it has undergone through time to lay the groundwork for revealing the possibilities for tragedy's continued existence. Although Aristotle proclaimed the action as the main concept in tragedy, it was later replaced by a different concept. Although not in theory established before Renaissance and Humanism, this was the concept of the subject. Especially important for my analysis is the fact that German Idealism concentrated on the understanding of the absolute subject and employed it also in its philosophy of tragedy. The critical analysis of tragedy in the last two hundred years has treated the tragic subject as the very core of the theory of tragedy.

The aim of my dissertation is twofold. While the main argument pertains to the concept of the subject in relation to dramatic tragedy, the second and related argument addresses the relevance of contemporary tragedy. It is my belief that these two issues are inextricably intertwined, however, for the purpose of my dissertation, subjectivity remains the primary focus. Through a close analysis of subjectivity and its concrete application in exemplary contemporary plays, I demonstrate that tragedy as such should not be perceived as an eternally unchanging monad. Quite the contrary, it consists of many constituent parts, all of which have their respective theoretical destinies that still work together within tragedy. How to view them is determined by the general cognitive mode of a society. For this reason it is my goal to investigate both above mentioned concepts throughout their history by concentrating on their contemporary shapes and in turn prove their significance today.

It is possible to see my dissertation as a genre study, yet it moves beyond the particular question of the genre. In order to arrive at a theoretical framework that supports the survival of tragedy, I engage in a detailed analysis of the subject in the domain both

of philosophy and of drama. Again, my primary intention is not to write about the survival of tragedy, but rather to undertake a historical and theoretical study of the subject.

This dissertation is, therefore, not designed to be a comprehensive history of tragedy, even though such an overview would make my argument more convincing. Such an approach would show constant evolution rather than the demise of the genre through time. Despite the rules and regulations set by either historians or theoreticians of literature, tragedy, too, is a living literary genre and not a static entity. Precisely because of the fact that tragedy follows the development of society, it remains as essential for the understanding of human comportment today as it once was in Greek antiquity. Tragedy contributes to the understanding of the totality of contemporary human experience.

For my methodological orientation I draw on Philosophy and Comparative Literature. In the theoretical chapters of the dissertation I employ two main methodological approaches that provide a more in-depth and, at the same time, broader perspective. The main concept under scrutiny is the concept of subject that *per se* belongs to the realm of conceptual thinking. The philosophical method is therefore used in the strictly theoretical passages, in which I discuss certain concepts with reference to the historical *loci* of philosophy. As warranted by the material I analyze, my argument will at times enter a more speculative realm of ontology, ethics, and epistemology. The period that I have chosen for a more detailed theoretical examination falls within the last two hundred years. I am particularly interested in German Idealist philosophers' conceptualization of the "philosophy of tragedy" and Romantic playwrights' representations of the tragic. One of the most, if not the most, instrumental thinker in the post-Renaissance era with regard to the (re)establishing of the tragedy was Hegel. His later lectures on aesthetics are even today of immense importance for the analysis of the genre. In addition to Hegel, there have been scores of other thinkers who have also applied their speculative abilities to the subject of tragedy: Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, Georg Lukács, Theodor W. Adorno, Raymond Williams, Northrop Frye to mention but a few. I shall also engage with the theoretical views of philosophers' and their critics.'

My analysis of the conceptual and the theoretical will be followed by comparative analyses of different periods that will enable me to reveal the points of convergence between philosophy, theory, and the literary practice. Tragedy, for all its philosophical provenience, is as much a philosophical entity as it is a literary one. If the first methodology works on a more vertical, in-depth analytical axis, the second one is horizontal and better oriented towards syntheses. This interweaving of the philosophical and the literary methods will shed further light on the survival of tragedy today.

The dissertation is divided into two parts: theory and practical application. The first part consists of three theoretical chapters, while the fourth and last chapter, in which four plays are discussed, represents the practical part.

The first chapter serves as a broader introduction into the problem of tragedy throughout history. In this chapter I sketch the problems that I consider crucial to understanding of the contemporary manifestations of the genre. Given the prevalence of Aristotelian theory in all discussions of tragedy, I begin with reflections on Aristotle's foundational treatise, *Poetics*. As an example of the paradigmatization of tragedy I analyze the concept of catharsis together with its reception and application in theory. While dealing with tragedy as an absolute entity, one cannot escape the question of the relationship between tragic drama and life or, in other words, art and reality. The nature of this relationship is examined in the following section on tragedy and myth, since myth's supposedly absolute qualities defined and, necessarily, also limited the genre itself. Together with the hypothesis of the genre's death I discuss the introduction of new genres such as tragicomedy and the turn to irony that have been considered instances of the continuation, albeit in a declined form, of tragedy. I conclude this chapter by returning to the issue of the relationship between art and life and posit that neither of the two can remain fixed and that neither is equally subject to development and change.

The next chapter deals with the question of the subject. Although it is an *a priori* philosophical concept, I investigate it with regard to its employment in tragedy, that is as both a conceptual and a real entity. My intention is to assess first the state of the subject in antiquity. It is essential to note that this investigation is focused on the understanding of the question of ancient subjectivity as it evolved within the philosophy of tragedy. My goal is thus to investigate the concept as the philosophers of German Idealism viewed it.

As a consequence, an important characteristic of the subject as a public entity is foregrounded. This perception, I argue, helps to underscore a rigid and totalizing idealist view of tragedy.

The following section studies the momentous shift in the understanding of the subject introduced during Renaissance and the age of Humanism and taken up by René Descartes. This shift in paradigm transformed the public person into the private individual, thereby affecting the nature of the tragic subject. I trace the development of the concept of the tragic subject through German Idealism and its mapping of a dialectical speculative system onto the Attic tragedy. One of the essential elements to have influenced the reception of subjectivity was the idea of absolute self-awareness that had been previously introduced by Hegel. The critique of Idealism in turn led to the formation of a new form of subjectivity that was, derived from an ever-increasing concept of relativity. This chapter ends with a discussion of Modernism, a period that elevated relativity to new heights and saw the emergence of the drama of the absurd.

The third chapter brings together the discussion of the tragic subject and the manifestations of tragedy today. I open the discussion with an analysis of poststructuralist thought. Two scholars are of seminal importance for this particular purpose, Derrida and Foucault, who both call into question the concept of a unified and fully-grounded subject. This absolute relativization is countered by Emmanuel Lévinas who lays the groundwork for a new post-deconstructive form of subjectivity. Lévinas shifts the perception of certain absolute values from ontological to deontological, from essence to the function. As I prove, it is this function that appears to have taken the previous role of ontology and, hence, constituted a new basis for the formation of the contemporary tragic subjectivity rooted in ethics.

Based on this conceptualization of subjectivity, I suggest that the genre of tragedy can be seen to have a continued existence in contemporary life. Since tragedy appears to have become too broad and too heavily connoted a concept, I argue for a new focus on the notion of the tragic situation that is much more limited than tragedy in general and, at the same time, much more individual, subjective, and concrete. While concluding this section, I emphasize also two additional stipulations for the conflictual situation to be truly tragic, unavoidability and irresolvability.

University of Alberta

Philosophical Aspects of the Tragic Subject: Its Evolution and Contemporary Dramatic Practice

by

Kristof Jacek Kozak

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

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2. TRAGEDY

My dissertation deals with the questions of the genre of tragedy both in contemporary literary theory as well as in dramatic literature. Based on such a binary yet unified perspective, the text is divided into two parts, of which the first comprises the first three chapters while the discussion of the concrete plays I have chosen is placed in the fourth and the last chapter. The main focus of this study is the key component of the tragic drama, namely the protagonist or, better yet, the subject. My argument is that the subject is, especially after its modern-age Cartesian emphasis, the hub of all the tragic phenomena and, therefore, has to be considered in any and all discussions of tragedy today. Since the contemporary literary scholarship on tragedy has been extremely skeptical with regard to the issue of the survival of the genre, it is my hope that through the prism of the subject, tragedy will fit into the contemporary (modern) realm. For this reason I shall provide a theoretical foundation on which the entire infrastructure of my dissertation is based. This theoretical base should provide enough evidence for the rethinking and defense of the genre and, as a consequence, also its rehabilitation.

Chapter 2 thus attempts to outline the questions on tragedy in contemporary scholarship. They are points of departure, from which I set out on my theoretical "quest." The theory of tragedy is even nowadays quite firmly based and dependent on the ideas that were introduced by Aristotle. His theory has become so influential that in order to deal with tragedy one has to take into account the philosopher's work. Because of this fact there arose certain problems that proved to be detrimental to a full and independent theoretical appreciation of contemporary tragedies.

Nonetheless, it is not my aim to dismiss Aristotelian influence altogether, but rather lay bare its rigid employment that has proved so damaging for tragedy. The first issue that I find the post-Aristotelian "absolutization" of the genre somewhat unsettling. Aristotle, by emphasizing the genre's aesthetic values, rescued tragedy from eradication at the hands of Plato who had discarded tragedy because of its chiefly mimetic values. That this has been a weighty accusation shows the example of Nietzsche who more than two millennia later used the same argument in order to accuse the conceptual thinkers

(such as Socrates) of the demise of the genre. Nonetheless, it was Aristotle who with his *Poetics* saved the genre and returned it to its previous glory. This treatise came to be perceived by the philosopher's followers not only as the fundamental theoretical work on the issue, which it incontestably is, but also as the only valid one. Even today most of the theoreticians fully accept Aristotle and only a few have expressed their doubts.[1]

Thus, as I explain in Chapter 2, the first disadvantageous issue for the contemporary assessment of tragedy is the rendering of the Aristotelian definition of tragedy into an absolute and eternally valid paradigm. *Poetics* was conceived as a taxonomic and not primarily as a normative work. It is exactly why Aristotelian influence has been acknowledged yet, at the same time, one should take a look at the development of the genre according to the values and norms of the society, in which it has been created. An example, together with the problems that may arise from a complete acceptance of the philosopher's stances, can be best seen through the concept of catharsis, which I analyze in this chapter.

An additional issue that influenced contemporary views on tragedy and that I mention in Chapter 2 has been the view of the early philosophers of tragedy, that is, the German Romantics and idealist philosophers, of the essential influence of ancient myths on the understanding of tragedy. I deal with this issue at large in this chapter, especially because of its totalizing influence on the understanding of the relation between art and life. In this domain, the Idealists only underscored Aristotelian thought and curtailed the development of the theory of tragedy.

Both concepts, that is catharsis and myth, are essential for tragedy. Even though the genre evolved, the perception of these two defining parameters remained unchanged. This inconsistency, as I show, led necessarily to the realization that the genre had mutated and also to the less obvious conclusion that the tragedy had ceased to exist. It is this rigid and rather unjustified perception of Aristotelian theory that produced the view about the "death of tragedy." In my analysis I touch upon two different views on the death of the

---

[1] Leon Rosenstein may provide an example of a stance accepting Aristotle, while the opposite stance is that of Walter Benjamin.

genre: the Nietzschean, finding fault with the "Socratic" thinking, and the post-Aristotelian, providing the reason for the genre to remain in the past.

In addition to drawing attention to the idea of the death of tragedy, I discuss the response of theoreticians to circumvent this obstacle. I have found two predominant strains of thought related to this issue. The first and much more common category searched for new genres that in fact replaced the "old, dead tragedy." One of the most far-reaching sub-categories saw the "continuation" of tragedy in its "debasing," that is in the form of irony. The other category, much less frequent, supported the view that the modern tragedy equals the Attic one, only with its key parameters altered. In the latter view, there was no doubt that contemporary tragedy, in essence, equals the ancient one and that the two extremes should be reconciled.

After having exposed these issues which are necessary to re-evaluate contemporary theory and philosophy of tragedy, I conclude this chapter by relating art to life. Here, too, extreme positions can be traced. Some scholars rejected the impact of external reality whereas others discarded art for the sake of the former. In the meantime, both elements have to be taken into account. As a consequence, today's tragedies are those of dissociation, of individualism, referring thus to reality, while being at the same time art, that is, according to Aristotle, broader than life.

My purpose in this chapter is, by virtue of showing what I perceive as irregularities, to claim that tragedy has not been given enough emphasis in contemporary scholarship and that it merits a thorough investigation. I argue further that tragedy has to be given back its place among the "living" literary genres. This strain of my argument will be developed in the later chapters.

As an artistic genre tragedy presents a special phenomenon in literary scholarship. It was the first to be described and defined as a literary genre at the beginning of what was later to become both a systematic study of *belles lettres* and a theoretical reflection on literature as such. Without any exaggeration, the discourse about tragedy is almost as ancient as the conceptual, that is Socratic, thinking stemming from the times when the intellectual ground was still being measured, investigated, and the first hermeneutic borders drawn.

Therefore, whoever nowadays approaches the question of tragedy, s/he has to take into account the entire tradition and feel compelled either to adopt or to reject it. Aristotle and his *Poetics* have become a standard reference through the ages. It is impossible to deal with tragedy even today without reference to *Poetics* first. Moreover, it also means taking into account the main concepts it introduced, such as character, catharsis, the three unities and others. Yet the major characteristic in understanding and assessing any "living genre" is to allow for its changes throughout history and to accept necessary deviations from the initially developed genre. To consider a genre fixed once and for all does not render justice either to the concept of the genre or to later attempts at constructing its modern version.

In this chapter what are in my view the most important issues in the discussion of tragedy today will be addressed. In the first place, there is one issue underlying all others, namely the function of Aristotelian *Poetics* throughout the ages. I shall look at the function of the canonization of the philosopher's work and on the results of this process for subsequent ages. This will be dealt with in the sub-chapter on tragedy as paradigm. It is obvious that in this historical process other issues have also been treated in a very similar way. Such is, in particular, the concept of catharsis that will find its own discussion within the above mentioned sub-chapter. Catharsis serves here only as an illustration of how the Aristotelian concepts were treated and venerated throughout the centuries. Even though, as has become obvious, reception cannot serve as the only criterion for the evaluation of works, catharsis at present still seems to be considered an exemption from this insight.[2]

Once this has been established, I shall broaden the scope in order to situate tragedy in its function within society. Like any human endeavour, it cannot be considered outside the realm of our existence, which, in turn, is conditioned by the values and ideals of our contemporary society. It is obvious that one cannot consider tragedy without reference to the state of the society in which it has been developed and defined, be it the

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[2] Of course, the changing public receptive sensibility has to be taken into consideration as well. Eighteenth century German view on art influencing reality is indisputably different from our contemporary, more cautious perspective. Yet, regardless of the theoretical bend of the time, catharsis has kept its central position.

ancient Greek or our contemporary world. A particular characteristic of the genre and the rules that the society was based on, together with the consequences of this relationship with regard to our understanding of the entire development of the genre will be addressed in the section on tragedy and myth. I shall argue that myth was crucial to establishing the parameters of the Attic tragedy. Therefore, to expect, as many a theorist did, that tragedy should have kept its constituent parts as well as its character intact, seems a rather mistaken conclusion. If the transcendental paradigm of the society changed, the same must have happened to the ingredients of tragedy. Therefore, it is difficult to simply claim today that tragedy is dead. Rather, one should instead expect it to have transformed.

This will bring my discussion of the key issues that tragedy faces today to a very contemporary debate, namely the question about tragedy's death or survival. To undertake this important argument comprehensively, I shall touch upon some suggested resolutions to it. This antagonism has sparked numerous responses varying from total rejection of the modern version of the genre to its rather reluctant acceptance. The dramatic (or even tragic) representation of this thesis's essential element, the dramatic subject, cannot be removed from the reality in which it is presented, on the one hand, yet, on the other, it cannot be considered equal to it either. In order to more effectively argue my point, I shall elucidate this issue with another one, that of the relationship between art and the reality that tragedy is set to depict.

In order to better understand the meaning of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the context of its time and place, I shall start with the fundamental issue of the relationship of reality and art. Plato was the first to question it and take the side of the reality unhindered by any artistic representation whatsoever. When he weighed newly established qualities of philosophical thinking, his evaluative scale leaned towards supporting the highest known imaginable values, of which the most significant appeared to be the truth. By "harnessing" it to support the highest possible goal, that being *pro publico bono*, he arrived at a conclusion that only that which is working towards supporting this utilitarian

scheme of virtue is welcome in his utopian creation of an ideal state.[3] Contrarily, what does not strive to attain this goal should be banned.

It is at that time that the difficult relations between the conceptual thinking (philosophy) and mimetic arts (*mimesis mimeseos*), particularly literature, came into being. At the beginning of this long history Plato posed seminal questions that have remained valid ever since. Questions such as those from the *Republic*: "does painting imitate reality or appearance? Does it imitate illusion or truth?" (X 598 b, 288) broadened to comprise all art, and have remained ultimately unanswered. The answers Plato offered were concise, with only one objective: the usefulness of art in the formation of society. For him "there is an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry [...] if poetry that is imitative and aims to provide pleasure can show cause why it should find a place in a well-governed city we should be glad to welcome its return from exile. We, too, are very aware of its charms. Of course, we must not be guilty of impiety by betraying what we think is true" (X 607 b, 298). The ideal supremacy of philosophical thinking put to ethical use was guaranteed, whereas art in general has been, after having been declared less truthful, relegated to second place.

The degree of influence that Plato's rejection exercised can be best illustratred and put into perspective with a short excursus into the relatively recent past when an influential thinker based his theory of tragedy on exactly the same issue. Despite the problem's seeming obsoleteness, its existence in our contemporary theoretical discourse on tragedy (Williams may be taken as an example) proves its importance and value for the taxonomy of the genre. That the consequences of this linking of art to ethics (endorsed in the end also by Aristotle) and then to reality is of no small importance was illustrated more than two millennia later when Friedrich Nietzsche upheld Plato's stance as his paramount proof for the overpowering of the genre in one of the most original works of literary scholarship, *The Birth of Tragedy*. It is important to make a small detour and include it here because of the weight that Nietzsche's theory has been granted in Postmodernism where he has been considered one of its forefathers. Thus it is of seminal importance for the discussion of the contemporary problem of tragedy.

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[3] Cf. Plato's *Republic* as well as *Phaidon*, *Phaidros* and *Nomoi*.

The only truly tragic period for Nietzsche, who concurred with the German romantics, was the era of the dawning Attic tragedy when the genre was, in the philosopher's opinion, still united under the ideal symbiosis of two divergent kinds of expression of nature itself: the Apolline and the Dionysiac. He argues that in their coupling – that is, in their reconciliation – nature received its most cherished vehicle of articulation: art.[4] The highest form of art for him was, in accordance with tradition, dramatic tragedy. Yet, Nietzsche claims, this Arcadian state was not a long-lasting one and a third force provoked the downfall of the genre that, in his opinion, was never to return again. He described this force as human thirst for theoretical, conceptual, logical understanding of that same nature that had been approached and explained through the means of art envisaging in the latter the particular performative role, that is "burdened" with ethics, which, in turn, pushed away the aesthetic qualities of the genre. Thus Nietzsche concluded that tragedy was lost. This revolutionary process occurred under the aegis of Socrates for whom aesthetic and transcendental values meant less than the teleological ones.[5] The regretful outcome of Socrates's enterprise (cf. Plato's *Apology of Socrates*) notwithstanding, this process started by the philosopher could not be held back.

For Nietzsche, this was the beginning of the end of the cognitive dominance of art in general and tragedy in particular since Socratism was a "sign of decline, of exhaustion, of sickness, of the anarchic dissolution of the instincts" (1999, 4). Socratism, with its fondness for the power of mind, ousted and displaced the "simple, transparent, beautiful" (1999, 46) qualities of the Apolline from its equation with the Dionysiac. The contribution of Socratism to the new arrangement was, in Nietzsche's view, the final destruction of illusion through its cold rationality, caustic power of mind, merciless weight of knowledge, harnessing art to perform moral tasks instead of letting it be a mere expression of the world. Nietzsche was well aware that "knowledge kills action; action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion" (1999, 40). Art could not, without any doubt, flourish under the pressure of such base circumstances. The new arrangement

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4 Cf. Nietzsche 1999, 20-21.

5 Plato's accounts are the best source of Socrates's thought. Regardless, their trustworthiness is questionable. Plato himself attempted to carry out pragmatically the utopian idea of a republic at the

presented itself as an opposition of coupled instances: "the Dionysiac versus the Socratic, and the work of art that once was Greek tragedy was destroyed by it" (1999, 60). The outcome of Nietzsche's extreme position was his vision of Socratism as the end of tragedy. Its death was forceful, tragic indeed, since "Greek tragedy perished differently from all the other, older sister-arts: it died by suicide, as the result of an irresolvable conflict, which is to say tragically, while all the others died the most beautiful and peaceful deaths, fading away at a great age" (1999, 54).

Regardless if Nietzsche were right or not, there is, in his opinion, no other tragedy but the Attic. Such a stance is obviously untenable as the genre's subsequent history proves, yet the temptation to proclaim tragedy obsolete has proved too compelling to disregard it completely. Even nowadays, as I shall show, there are numerous scholarly voices supporting this stance, claiming with the philosopher, although on quite different presumptions, that tragedy is dead.[6] Even though Nietzsche judged that philosophical thinking had taken its nefarious toll on art, it was precisely one of the most important theoretical minds of antiquity that, in fact, rescued tragedy from obsolescence, established the genre as we know it today and, finally, attributed to it the teleological character. At present, the idea of the death of tragedy does not follow Nietzsche in his ultra-aesthetic ruminations but, rather, rests on the presumption that the Aristotelian theory that had rescued tragedy in antiquity cannot be adhered to.

Aristotle offered a vocal rejection of Plato's ideas.[7] Not only did he venture into rescuing the entire concept of art as a mimetic representation, but he also bettered its position as to make it the most important expression of reality. Aristotle's epistemological stance towards art was fundamentally different from his teacher's heavily dismissive treatment, so too it differed in the question of tragedy, juxtaposing it to other sciences (history) and other literary genres (epic). In the first group, he compared art (poetry) with science (history), thus making an argument in favour of the former by

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court of Dionysios the Younger in Syracuse, Sicily, but failed and was forced to flee (cf. Tatarkiewicz 91).

6 For Nietzsche's further discussion of the "death of tragedy" see 1999, 33 *et passim*.

7 In regard to which I can mention a saying attributed to Aristotle, namely that "amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas" ["Plato is a friend, yet truth is a greater friend," my translation].

claiming that poetry is more worthy of praise[8] because it deals with more universal truths than history. In the second group, he underscored the cognitive values of artistic endeavours placing them above the scientific ones and paving the way for an uninhibited acclaim of poetry.

The following centuries could not help but reinforce Aristotle's immense influence on the development of the theory of tragedy as well as on budding literary axiology. So much so that it became the only valid theory. Later, scholars could agree or disagree, interpret or misinterpret Aristotle's theoretical positions, the fact is that virtually nobody could omit *Poetics* and its classification. The work's tremendous authority has been proved in its standardization or, rather, canonization of tragedy, which became the first theoretically defined and established literary model. In this process, Aristotle's definitions were taken at face value, sometimes possibly reinterpreted but, without any doubt, elevated to the level of a law. Such an example is a well known early development of Aristotelian tenets, as was the case of the rule of the three unities already by noteworthy Renaissance commentators such as Francesco Robortello, Julius Caesar Scaliger, Giangiorgio Trissino, and the most important among them Lodovico Castelvetro.[9]

The entire tradition of Aristotle's influence can be summed up in two main streams. Even though some tried to belittle Aristotle's influence, such as Walter Benjamin who in his discussion of the German tragic drama did not find Aristotelian definitions helpful but, on the contrary, "inhibiting [...] to any appreciation of the value of the dramas" (1977, 60), there were others, for example Leon Rosenstein, who thought Aristotle's *Poetics* to be "the most pervasive and profound meditation on the nature of tragedy" (59) and went even further to claim that "where possible and appropriate, [...] [he himself] shall adopt, reinterpret, or reconstruct [...] [Aristotle's] argument" (59).

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8 Aristotle explains that "the true difference is that the one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular" (1951, IX 1451 b, 35).

9 Francesco Robortello's title was *Librum Aristotelis de arte poetica explicationes* (1548), Julius Caesar Scaliger's *Poetice* (1561), Giangiorgio Trissino's *La Poetica* (especially books five and six, 1563), and Lodovico Castelvetro's *Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata e sposta* (1570).

The more recent state of the scholarship is, among others, classified also by Peter Szondi who sees it as chiefly Aristotle's doing: "die Poetik der neueren Zeit beruht wesentlich auf dem Werk des Aristoteles, ihre Geschichte ist dessen Wirkungsgeschichte" (1964, 7). Aristotle's seminal, timeless influence, Szondi says, is proved by the "gewaltige [...] Einflußbereich des Aristoteles, der weder nationale Grenzen kennt noch epochale" (1964, 7). It appears logical, then, that John Drakakis and Naomi Conn Liebler could freely state that "the formal Aristotelian categories used to describe tragedy have, for the most part, remained current although their discursive force has been transformed over time" (3).

It is obvious that, contrary to what Nietzsche claimed, Aristotle established and fixed the theoretical paradigm of tragedy, not only for his own time but so far for all ages. Clearly, the philosopher's ancient theory and the subsequently written tragic works of art were bound to grow distinctly apart. For my present endeavour of reevaluating contemporary tragedy it is of paramount importance to clarify the far-reaching consequences of the mentioned canonization by tackling the most important issues with regard to scholarship on tragedy. The goal of the ensuing discussion is to unveil the results of this early yet thorough homogenization of the tragic genre.

2.1 Tragedy as Paradigm

The following section exposes Aristotle in his role as the lawmaker for tragedy. His *Poetics* has subsequently become the "law" and, as such, has been considered unmutable. This happened during the Renaissance, French Neoclassicism, and also during last two hundred years, the period in which, according to Szondi, the "philosophy of tragedy" evolved. The ossification of the rules became detrimental to the free development of the genre. This tendency remain unchanged even today, which I show by the example of Raymond Williams who warns his readers against the "absolutization" of tragedy. I also point out the problem of a paradigm that set certain rules, which are not to be broken. One would be tempted to say that such a treatment put tragedy into a theoretical straight jacket.

Without any doubt, Aristotle's *Poetics* has been the canonizing source for the standardization of the genre ever since its inception. In this sub-chapter I shall discuss the far-reaching consequences of this state of affairs and, consequently, argue against the solidifying of its forms as well as the hardening of the rules that define it. In order to fully appreciate and evaluate a living artform one has to allow for its evolution. Also, one has to conceive of it as a constantly evolving entity whose rules and regulations simply should not be seen as unchangeable and set once and for all.

Even though such an aim might have not been Aristotle's primary intention, it was the overall significance of his work and his philosophical authority that allowed him to become a law-maker. By an ardent defense of tragedy's right to exist, by putting it above epic poetry, and by declaring both its ethical as well as aesthetic advantage over the former, Aristotle came to be seen by subsequent exegetes as a protector of the (just) cause of art's highest form. This valuable enterprise resulted, without Aristotle's explicit intention, in somewhat less laudable consequences. Namely, his placement of tragedy above all other genres has been understood as converting it into an untouchable entity. His theory has been coupled with the imperatives that have been perceived as its logical consequences and made into an immovable absolute stance.

The question arises as to what extent *Poetics* can be called a developed philosophy of tragedy because Aristotle's approach was less concerned with the role of concepts *à priori* than with their function in concrete dramatic works. The nature of law is that it pertains to all cases. For that purpose it has to be as general as possible and inclusive rather than exclusive. In comparison with his more philosophical works, *Poetics* was not even intended to be a normative but, rather, a taxonomic treatise. On the basis of this realization, Szondi has arrived at an extremely lucid distinction between "Poetik der Tragödie" and the "Philosophie des Tragischen" (1964, 7). He credits Aristotle with the creation of the poetics of the genre while crediting Schelling with the creation of the philosophy of tragedy. Szondi explains that "die Schrift des Aristoteles [will] die Elemente der tragischen Kunst bestimmen; ihr Gegenstand ist die Tragödie, nicht deren Idee" (ibid.). After Szondi's intervention one should be aware of the nature of *Poetics* and its consequent implications. It is not the text deliberating on the concept or *Idee* of tragedy as such, but rather describing and analyzing the Attic works known to its author.

Put differently, it is not a general idea of tragedy that is set as a paradigm, or as a standardized tragic model, but the best examples of Attic tragedy. Opinions such as the one by Williams that "to examine the tragic tradition [...] is not necessarily to expound a single body of work and thinking, or to trace variations within an assumed totality" (16) show that Aristotle's limitations have been recognized and sometimes taken into account, which has freed tragedy from the burden of the past, and opened a niche for an existence of its own.

Be that as it may, Aristotle's description defined tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in a language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several versions found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions" (1951, 1449b, 23). As early as in Antiuqity, complex theories have been drawn from this definition, regardless of whether the original precepts had been properly understood or, as often the case, quite misinterpreted. Many a concept was additionally elaborated in respect to the original text, sometimes seeing in it more than there truly was to be seen (the above-mentioned Renaissance expansion and succeeding classicist servile compliance with the rule of the three unities is but one example).

Since its inauguration, *Poetics* was set to become a model for both theoretical discussions and practical attempts at writing tragedies. All ensuing interpretations did nothing but add to the charisma of Aristotle and his text. Yet the rudimentary problem of a paradigm or a model is that neither is ever to be surpassed because overtaking or overthrowing it would unseat the primary examples and thus contradict the model's very purpose. This "golden cage" of tragic drama and the limitations of later authors are laconically described by Marmontel in Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, "d'un autre côté cependant, [...] les autres qui font venus après, *n'ont pu y ajouter que des rafinemens capables d'abâtardir ce genre*, en voulant lui donner un air de nouveauté" (513 b, emphasis added). Clearly, any change, any novelty in the old usages automatically meant bastardizing the (canonized) form of the genre, which, in the case of tragedy, because of its preferred status, was not even imaginable. Thus tragedy was condemned to being either the Aristotelian Attic tragedy or not being at all.

Such a turn of events clearly had both positive and negative effects. Among the positive ones was the genre's firm positioning on the literary map throughout the ages[10] as well as qualitative requirements imposed on playwrights who wanted to tackle the genre of tragedy. When the rules were supposed to be observed more literally this pressure was stronger, and in the cases of more lax societal "control" also the *decorum* was apprehended less strictly. Yet it is precisely with this last issue that the less emphatic effects are associated. On the one hand, the standardization works in favour of the plays already written, while it is, on the other, detrimental to all those that are to follow because it sets the already known works of art as a model. The character of these established and acknowledged works, if we are to observe their nature, is never to be questioned, let alone changed. By – to a certain extent – rigidly placing the standard, it also delineated the borders with which the future works of art would have to comply, unless their authors wanted to be proclaimed iconoclasts.[11]

Further development of the theory of tragedy unfortunately cannot boast any less rigidity in dealing with its subject-matter. Tragedy was thus constricted within the rules and laws. Although they were, as it was argued, derived from Aristotle solely in order to enhance and protect it, they did little more than severely limit, hinder and restrict its further evolution. In addition, they hampered the theoretical thinking and practical experiments outside the pre-established moulds.[12] The entire retrospect of the compliant tradition in dealing with tragedy should, then, come as no surprise.

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10 The genre, together with its supposed supremacy, survived through time, despite its long periods of hibernation, such as during the Middle Ages. Still, there are some scholars such as Sydney Lamb who voice their support for "medieval tragedy." In Sydney's case it is *Everyman* (23-25).

11 Such an example of the most stringent observing of the "rules" is French Classicism and, particularly, aspects of *La querelle des anciens et des modèrnes*.

12 A powerful influence of this tradition can be best proved by a statement issued as late as 1966 by social theoretician Raymond Williams, an otherwise staunch supporter of the contemporary tragedy, who claimed that "there has been no re-creation and in effect no reproduction of Greek tragedy, and

In the final chapter of this dissertation I analyze four dramatic works as examples of contemporary tragedies that can be seen to conform to these criteria. The plays I have chosen emanate from France, Canada, England, and the United States: Bernard-Marie Koltès's *Roberto Zucco* (1988), Sharon Pollock's *Doc* (1984), David Greig's *Europe* (1994), and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991). This choice is intended to provide a broad spectrum on which to test the ideas about the contemporary tragic subjectivity. My analysis of these plays will follow a previously established binary pattern of investigation: first I examine the dramatic characters, then I study the tragic attribute of the plays. My final goal in this dissertation is to disprove statements about the death of tragedy. The genre has necessarily changed, as have the societies from which it draws its material.

him, catharsis means a "security valve" that prevents the audience from truly living through the tragic experience. For Nietzsche it is a means to "cheat," that is to participate, without getting involved.

Nowadays catharsis still has a place in the hub of scholarly debates, despite numerous opinions voiced against it. If one could reduce the reproaches to one common denominator, it would be the intrinsically subjective nature of the concept and its inability to refer to the objective qualities of the world. There is the immanent danger of accepting catharsis into tragedy's primary definition because "it should be pointed out that an artistic form can never be determined by its effect" (Benjamin 1977, 51). This stance is similar to Goethe's as expressed in a letter to C. F. Zelter from March 23, 1827. Catharsis was, therefore, established by Aristotle, although Goethe while not agreeing with the meaning bestowed on the concept, still feels the need to defend the philosopher by claiming he had been misunderstood: "die Vollendung des Kunstwerks in sich selbst ist die ewige unerläßliche Forderung! Aristoteles, der das Vollkommenste vor sich hatte, soll an den Effekt gedacht haben! Welch ein Jammer!" (104). Goethe's point of view followed the idealist vein by clearly venerating Aristotle's theory.[17] As we shall see later in the discussion of myth, the transcendence in the ancient society did, to a certain extent, vouch for and justify a totalizing understanding of the world. This, in turn, characterized the theoretical conceptualizations. The more complete the ancient society in its multifaceted nature seems, the less necessary, which is made obvious in Goethe's critique, does catharsis as a crucial foundation of tragedy appear.[18]

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17 Almost a century later, a formally similar yet, in fact, much more critical statement was issued by the doyen of the German classical philology from the turn of the century, Ulrich von Willamowitz-Moellendorff, who in his *Einleitung in die griechische Tragödie* (1907) clearly maintained that "it must be realized that catharsis cannot exercise a determining influence on drama as a genre" (109). Quoted in Benjamin 1977, 52.
This was the same Willamowitz-Moellendorff who wrote a scathing review of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* in which he rejected the latter's liberal, indeed artistic approach to science (cf. Raymond Geuss xxviii).

18 Interestingly, much later some authors felt the need to resuscitate catharsis once again. Arthur Miller tried hard to prove that the modern age is as capable of producing and, especially, experiencing the tragic as had been the ancient era. In his article, "Tragedy and the Common Man," writing about modern, that is our contemporary experience of tragic feeling, he states that "the quality in such plays that does shake us, however, derives from the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world. Among us today this fear is as strong, and perhaps stronger, than it ever was" (5).

As I have already suggested, relying on the audience's reception while trying to construct a definition of an essential dramatic genre seems to have made sense only in the period in which it had been conceived: the antiquity, the eighteenth century etc. Although they function within their time-limits, the perspective of the reception should not overlap. This particular era, as it was believed during Romanticism and German Idealism, was characterized by more or less unchanged metaphysical parameters, from which all the other societal and individual values were extracted. Such a perspective became problematic when society started drifting into a different eschatological model, adopting different value-systems, and also bracing for new artistic paradigms. It is rather obvious, too, that the audience's reception changed. Nonetheless, the importance of reception on the one hand, and its precariousness on the other have been confirmed in the twentieth century, to a varying degree of course, by different literary theories such as Roman Ingarden's phenomenological aesthetics, Hans Robert Jauß's and Wofgang Iser's *Rezeptionsästhetik*, Stanley Fish's extreme reader-response theory, theories of communication and semiotics, as well as other sociologically based scholarly approaches as, for example, diverse strains of feminism.[19] It is reasonable to conclude that the inclusion of audience as one of the regulatory principles should be, if at all, embraced with the greatest vigilance for it is one outside the work of art and thus also one that may very easily lead scholarly research astray. In other words, to conclude that if a play does not necessarily invoke catharsis it is not worthy of being called tragedy seems hermeneutically a weak, if not an intrinsically wrong, deduction.[20]

Catharsis became one of the essential beacons of tragedy through the ages. Regardless of its reception-determined character, (cf., for example, Berke, Leech, Nuttall) it is still considered to be the fundamental quality of any and every tragedy. Aristotle's attempt at classification of his contemporary tragedies was place- and time-specific,

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19 Cf. Peter V. Zima's "Preface" to his extremely informative *The Philosophy of Modern Literary Theory*.

20 This, of course, is not to say that there cannot be characteristics of these elements which are not more permanent than others. The heroes such as Antigone or Oedipus, Juliet Capulet or Hamlet, Hedda Gabler or Faust, have been captivating audiences by and large by their obviously trans-temporal qualities. They do contain human traits recognized by audiences from divergent periods and places. What is so mesmerizing is perhaps less the particularity of their respective situations than the universality, that is, the humaneness of their reasoning and feelings wrapped into an individual person.

wherefore in order to elucidate the contemporary scholarship's inclusions of catharsis in the definition of tragedy I shall discuss the essential link between the ancient world-view and society, that of ancient myth. Thus more light will be shed on the specific placement of art, that is tragedy, in the Greek society, as it was seen by the German philosophers of tragedy and as it has influenced the entire discourse on tragedy.

Regardless of myths' seeming obsoleteness, they are as present as ever in contemporary theoretical discourses on tragedy as well as in contemporary culture and society.

2.2 Tragedy and Myth

The following section discusses the inception of the philosophy of tragedy that, by virtue of its theoretical bent, that is Idealism, helped in perpetuating the absolute perception of tragedy. The theoreticians' idealized view of ancient Greece allowed for their total equation of real life with myth. Tragedy was believed to have gained momentum since it, in an Aristotelian way, represented myths as functions of reality. The Idealist circle was thus closed. As I demonstrate, the perception of the Attic society as indivisible from their myths created the impression of an all-inclusive world, in which there is no boundary between myth and reality, that is between art and life, which necessarily brought tragedy again to the fore. As a result, aesthetic impressions were linked with ethical concerns. Needless to say, such a totalizing view was made possible only by Idealism. The more the totality of tragedy was emphasized by the Idealists, the faster it fell into oblivion after the turnabout, that is with the appearance of its critique. The idealist premises proved to be untenable.

Yet again, the idealist influence on the scholarship about tragedy was so great that the questions of both catharsis and myth weighed heavily on the subsequent discussions about tragedy. This provoked, as I argue further, a strong resentment. Theoreticians, such as Rosenzweig and Williams, disagreed with such an absolutization. Unfortunately, theirs were the voices of a minority.

What holds for the idealist perception of catharsis can be without reservation applied also to the concept of myth. In this subdivision I am going to show why this concept cannot be used as a contemporary hermeneutic reference for the analysis of present-day tragedies. The degree and quantity of adherence to Aristotelian tenets today by contemporary scholars cannot be stressed enough.

The presumed ancient full homogeneity between society, transcendence, and its members, as well as its utmost harmony regarding the vision of the world have been, in particular, underscored since the early romantic period, yet became even more striking in contrast with the dawning of the modern era and the discordant shifts that occurred in that period.[21] This apparent lack of correspondence between the periods, or even their contrariness, underscore even more the centripetal solidifying qualities of the antiquity never to be resurrected once they had been terminated.

The discussion of catharsis was deliberately mentioned for through its function the particular characteristic of ancient society, which made the ancient world significantly different from any subsequent one, is revealed. Catharsis was perceived to be that functional trigger in tragedy, which made art appear to be a worthwhile (ethical) pastime in antiquity and, consequently, significantly helped in allowing for tragic plays to be placed at the top of the evaluative scale. It was capable of tipping the balance in favour of tragedy because of a particular character of response by the public, because of a specific reaction that the representation evoked in the audience. The particular entity, which this unique characteristic of the period has been based upon, is the idealist understanding of the connection within the "system," that is between the society and its transcendence, the real and the ideal, that is, the quality and the degree of the inclusion of the audience in the myth. These two visions form a circle in which each part is necessary for the other and the movement between the two is perpetual. The most appropriate illustration would be the concept of the hermeneutical circle between the general and particular, the plural and singular. My intent here is to expose what was believed to be the dependence of the ancient Greek society on myth and to what extent, according to German romantics and

idealist philosophers, both influenced Attic tragedy. They believed that the interconnectedness was unreserved and complete. Although perhaps not entirely correct, their presupposition nevertheless underscores the dependence of art on society, which brings me to the conclusion that it is wrong even to suppose that elements of tragedy continued to exist unchanged.[22]

The ancient world-view has been subsumed in idealist philosophy of tragedy under the concept of the "heroic." In Hegel's words, the tragic action is viable solely in the "Weltzustand [...], den ich früher als den *heroischen* bezeichnet habe. Denn nur in den heroischen Tagen können die allgemeinen sittlichen Mächte [...] in ursprünglicher Frische als die Götter auftreten" (II: 560). Yet this *Weltzustand* necessarily brings to mind another condition, the *condition humaine*. It seems necessary that this heroic state that enables the tragic action, has all its components interconnected or, in other words, presents a successful blending of a variety of elements ranging from political and social, to religious and cultural. In antiquity, all these systems were believed to be rooted in the same basic values, so the societal fabric they were woven into looked as if it had been made out of one fabric. And this fabric of the ancient Greek world is nothing else, as it was believed, than its transcendental sphere, its myths. Thus, the foundation of the "heroic state of the world" and, in turn, of the human condition was believed to be ancient Greek mythology.[23] The mythical realm was seen as the common denominator for different elements of society or the collective foundational platform for functionally diverse realms of the experiential world. The fully operational concept of catharsis proves the "heroic" interconnectedness.

In addition to that, myth was believed to be the link for ancient Greeks between the past and the present, the sole basis and reason for the cyclically experienced concept of time. Mythology was simultaneously perceived as the content and the form of the real

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21 Here I have in mind scholars and authors such as Schiller, Schelling, the young Friedrich Schlegel, Goethe, Hölderlin, and perhaps even Novalis, even though they did not resist the idea of their contemporary tragedy.

22 For an informed discussion on myth in ancient society cf. Lehmann's *Theater und Mythos: Die Konstitution des Subjekts im Diskurs der antiken Tragödie*.

23 With Benjamin's words, "the oracle in tragedy is more than just a magical incantation of fate; it is a projection of the certainty that there is no tragic life which does not take place within its framework" (1977, 115).

Attic world. With its exemplified stories (legends), it gave to ancient Greeks their symbolic origin, their point of venture, the formulas for life and death, the methods to organize their every-day life and, for this reason, to place it in the greater frame of existence. Learning about and making politics and culture, warfare and love, betrayal and business etc. meant for ancient Greeks, from the point of view of the tragic, dramatic renditions of reality, as much as repeating and reliving the myths.

The mentioned unity of foundations gave antiquity in these ancient minds one more novel feature: totality, if not absoluteness. Through the interconnectedness of these foundations, the Greek heroes who represented their own private sphere in the first place were seen to extend their influence well into public life. They were perceived as the personification of this life. Yet these heroes were not individuals as we know them today. They were only similar to the full-fledged entities, symbolically singled out but still standing for the entire world. It was Hegel's realization that the ancient Greeks were the first to enable "das Prinzip der freien Individualität," (II: 558). Still, this individuality carried a meaning that was a far cry from our contemporary idea of the subject.

In Hegel's view, singular individuality is separate only in so far as it stands up against the "substantiality" of which it is part yet, by the necessary condition of becoming an individual, conceives of different goals and aspirations. In other words, while remaining in the grand scheme of absolute life, the hero manages to break out of that design. The concept of the "absolute tragedy" cannot be reduced only to our contemporary vision of life.[24] In antiquity, according to the idealist perception, heroes amalgamated with reality. In fact, their role was to prove the total unity of the ancient world. Whenever something happened to the heroes, it was perceived as a danger to the world as well. Whenever an ancient hero fell, the entire universe swayed with that collapse and threatened to fall apart. And contrarily, when, for example, Oedipus resolved the Sphynx's riddle, he saved not only Thebes (just to plunge the city and himself into even deeper disaster) but also the then known world. In this sense, Thebes

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[24] Benjamin, for example, asserts this by claiming that "the content of the hero's achievements belongs to the community" (1977, 108). The two realms were inextricably linked, because "the object of the latter [tragedy] is not history, but myth, and the tragic stature of the *dramatis personae* does not derive

should be understood as a synecdochal counterpart to the World and as its symbolic embodiment. Thus, in a hero's fate, early philosophers of tragedy would claim, the ancient audience recognized its own destiny, it was in his hands that their individual lots were placed. In ancient tragic drama, these realities are much more intricate on the one hand, yet also more simple on the other. This supposition leads to the issue of a protagonist's deontology, which will be dealt with later, namely the interweaving of the character and his/her deeds.

This particularly firm, if not absolute, idealist/romantic connection of the real and symbolic elements and their merger with one another gave the hero of antiquity a special and unique character. A particular characteristic of antiquity was its blending of art and reality, two concepts that were considered by both Plato and Aristotle ontologically the same and only epistemologically dissimilar entities. For Plato, mimesis bears the main fault for this estrangement from the true essence, yet, for Aristotle, it was still only a different way of cognition. It is exactly because of the crossing and firm intertwining of two realms: the public and the private, the real and the ideal one, or better yet, because of their essential sameness,[25] that in response to it such a profoundly personal instance as the above-mentioned catharsis could be considered in a substantial, normative way. It was a sublime (in the original Kantian sense) response to the (tragic) action in the theatre, understood as the paraphrase of the world itself.[26] The coupling of the singular ("das subjektive Pathos," II: 525) and the universal ("das objektiv Patetische," II: 525), with their reconciliation as the synthesis because that is what gives the art "Präsenz und Versöhnung des Absoluten im Sinnlichen und Erscheinenden" (II: 586), is precisely what Hegel based his dialectics of the tragic action on. Moreover, "das eigentliche Thema der ursprünglichen Tragödie sei das Göttliche; aber nicht das Göttliche, wie es den Inhalt des religiösen Bewußtseins als solchen ausmacht, sondern wie es in die Welt, in das individuelle Handeln eintritt" (II: 548). The interconnectedness of the real and the

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from rank – the absolute monarchy – but from the pre-historic epoch of their existence – the past age of heroes" (1977, 62).

25 The key to its understanding can be found in what Hegel called "die Exposition des inneren Geistes der Handlung" (II: 524).

26 Interestingly enough, such a stance seems to have anachronistically survived in a more contemporary "mythology," such as that of Christianity, with the notorious Papal blessing *urbi et orbi*.

mythological (not deistic) is clearly understood.[27] Hegel credited ancient heroes with absolute characteristics. They are, as he states, "hohe, absolut bestimmte Charaktere" (II: 561) because only "die menschliche Wirklichkeit [...] mit seinem ganzen Interesse und Sein" (ibid.) can constitute the necessary elements for a full-scale individuality.[28] Clearly, Hegel's description fits entirely the Romantic systemic vision of the ancient heroes and their implication in their contemporary world. Every-day life in antiquity, he maintains, cannot be distanced in any way from the tragic action. From the opposite point of view, ancient tragedies were absolutely true to the ancient life as well.[29] If ancient heroes have been "inexhaustible," it is precisely because of their total fusion with the world in mythology. The phenomenon of the period lies in the mythical fusion of the fictionality and "life." In antiquity, it was believed, there was no "inside" or "outside," which was considered precisely its mystery.[30]

As numerous as the theories of the function of mythology in ancient tragedies have been, so too were the conceptions of the myths themselves. For the purpose of my discussion I shall not discuss, of course, myths *per se* but rather touch upon myths as employed in Greek dramas. Their definitions have varied according to the theoreticians' assessments of the usages of myths in theatre. Interestingly enough, the trait which can be predominantly observed is the particularization of a myth's function. What I mean by this is that myths have in most cases been ascribed one singular field, one ethical message and were, therefore, devoted to only one function. For example, the mythical Theban cycle contains a variety of "stories" yet every one was supposed to be dealt with in a separate

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27 Karl Japers, in a form of a mythical interpretation of the tragic, suggested that "mythische Interpretation ist ein Denken in Bildern, aber in Bildern als Wirklichkeiten" (1961, 54).

28 These words found resonance in the claim of such a contemporary author as Elinor Fuchs, namely that "the inexhaustibility of the great Greek tragic roles lies precisely in this mystery, that their tragic actions do not appear directly to be anchored in the recognizable contexts of psychological and material life" (24).

29 It has to be noted that the modern-era approach was fundamentally different from the idealistic one. Such is Lukács's basic realisation that "das neue Leben hat keine Mythologie, und dies bedeutet, daß die Themata der Tragödien in einer künstlichen Distanz vom Leben gehalten werden müssen" (1981, 114).

30 This is a stance fiercely criticized, for example, by Steiner in his article about the absolute tragedy (1990). There he maintains that "being wholly tragic in plot and presentation, Greek tragic drama seems "absolute". But this is an optical illusion" (1990, 149). Absolute tragedy exists, Steiner further claims, in "the crime of man that he is, that he exists" (1990, 147), therefore tragedy is impossible because "it is false to life" (1990, 151).

tragic drama. In tragic dramas, ancient myths were employed teleologically, didactically perhaps, so that their moral reading and practical understanding would not be hampered. Their message had to be fully transparent.[31] The origins of this complication may be best seen on the example of the technical translation of Aristotle's *mýthos* into "plot" thereby leaving out its crucial mythical qualities. Myth, as German philosophers of tragedy believed, involved the entire society in terms of both time and space. It truly was all-encompassing and to limit them to one stratum is a gross misappropriation.[32] For the philosophers of tragedy, therefore, Greek tragedy lived *in myth* because the Greek society lived *the myth*.

The questions about the purpose of myths have been argued and taken to different extremes,[33] yet throughout the early stages of the philosophy of tragedy myths are perceived as disclosing an absolute functional unity of the above qualities. The presence of myth in ancient drama seems to be but an artistic mirror-image of the same social function of myth in Attic reality.[34] One could understand Plato who argued against the shrewd belittling of the lived reality. Clearly, the present-day splitting of the idea of myth into at least two functions does not correspond to Aristotle's initial intentions.[35] This said, a warning is most fitting in order to avoid misunderstanding. What I have tried to underscore so far is that because of the paradigmatization of tragedy certain key elements of tragedy have withstood the changes of time and are as present in today's theoretical discussions as they have been throughout the genre's history. Nevertheless, since the paradigmatized model of tragedy is the Attic one and as such was so completely intertwined with the ancient form of society it is my firm belief that tragedy may under no circumstances be considered as unchangeable throughout the ages. This is especially

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31 It was not before the Renaissance that the doubt entered tragic works of art. This statement is best supported by the Shakespearean tragic figure of Hamlet. His character is an outstanding example of modern-era subjective doubt.

32 John Orr, for example, maintains that "without the use of Greek myth, any tragedy would have been unthinkable" (186).

33 The views of myth swayed between the secular and sacral description of myths. Jaspers would call them mythical and philosophical functions (cf. 1953, 90-96; 1961, 54-8).

34 The Attic tragic dramas were, borrowing the descriptive from Steiner, "absolute" because of the monolithically conceived society, where the life of an individual (that is a citizen worthy of stage representation) was not separated from the life of the community, and where, in turn, transcendence was an essential part of every-day life.

the case after the shifts that introduced the modern age. As I have shown, the period of the inception of the philosophy of tragedy – that is, the early nineteenth century – has adopted and worked with these terms as if they were unchangeable and absolute. Very little attention has been paid to the fact that between the ancient Greek society and today the world has changed not once but several times. This is why this automatic conjecture has to be exposed.

Nonetheless, between the extremes, between the idealist absolutization of the Aristotelian concepts, which is the general consent with regard to the invariability of the essentials of tragedy, and their complete rejection there were only a few theoretical views that tried to consolidate opposite stances or, in other words, were aware that the ancient concepts cannot be transposed to contemporary reality without something being left out. At this point I would like to provide a few examples of such theories.

An important voice among those who tried to illustrate a more comprehensive view of the problem was that of Franz Rosenzweig. Having been aware to what degree myth permeated the ancient society and vice versa he made his claims on the basis of a presumption of the total fusion of two realms: the mythological and the real. It was believed that in ancient Greece history (legend) was fused with reality (life), that the present was only a reliving of the past and that the future was known ahead of time because of the predictability of the mythical structure and the cyclical, that is repetitious, character of time.[36] In such a state of the world, although being part of it, the hero, Rosenzweig claims, must feel abandoned and lonely. The ancient "self" cannot know anything other than itself, because there is nothing outside it and because this self is already everything. The tragic hero's being singled out for a particular performance like no other Attic protagonist signifies only that the weight of that enclosed world rests fully on his/her shoulders, and that he/she exists as its structural part. For ancient heroes there is no other way than acting out what destiny had burdened them with. The distance between the tragedy lived in life (reality) and viewed on the stage (representation) begins

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35 Aristotle originally used myth for both the legend and plot.

36 This is one of the fundamental patterns of the cyclical concept of time namely, certain repeated actions bring about certain events. There is no space for novelty or uncommonness unless the world

to disappear. In Rosenzweig's opinion, myth cannot be talked about and separately analyzed. It can only be lived, that is experienced on the same plane with the lived reality. This is why in ancient Greece the two cannot be, in any case, considered separately. While talking about the "criterion of the self" Rosenzweig reveals that "the tragic hero has only one language which completely corresponds to him: precisely keeping silent [...] Tragedy casts itself in the artistic form of drama just in order to be able to represent speechlessness [...] The self knows of nothing other than itself; its loneliness is absolute" (77). His insight stresses the consciousness of the hero's enclosure in myth, his/her consequent isolation and, consequently, forceful exposure to silence.[37] The past does not always want to talk to us, which may also be the case with the ancient heroes.

In a comparable vein, Williams argues that "the deepest inquiries and modes of understanding run back, continually, into particular myths, and this quality is of critical importance in awareness about the nature of the art. For it is the nature of myth that it resists anterior explanation" (17). Myths, although an indispensable element of ancient art, start to fall apart as soon as one tries to analytically separate their threads and investigate them closely. Nonetheless, I am convinced that this does not warrant dispensing with myths altogether. Firstly, Williams avers that "the tragic personage is broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence" (8). Quite clearly, what one cannot understand, let alone rationally fathom, of that one cannot speak. Williams also asserts that tragedy's "space is inwardness" (17), which is a response to Steiner's conclusion that today there can be no tragedy. Inwardness, which is closed in itself, yet, as we have seen, through myth stretches also beyond its limits to include literally the entire known world. Although correctly attributed to Attic tragedy, the change of the genre should have been taken into account parallel with the change of society.

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comes seriously out of joint. Each irregularity means also serious trouble for the society experiencing it.

37 This silence is akin to, yet different from, the silence of modern tragic heroes who will be discussed in the following chapters.

This is a step that Steiner and many other scholars have not been willing to take, although it is a necessary precondition if one wants to evaluate contemporary tragedy unhindered by the "baggage" of the past. Only with the shift in the entire socio-artistic paradigm one can rightfully establish new limits of the old concepts because the advancement of society is based on adoption of the new paradigms by its constituent parts. Unfortunately, too frequently this connection has not been realized. With obvious gaping chasms between the society and its art – in our case it is tragedy, which has been, I have to reiterate, understood as canonized and therefore far too rigid to absorb transformations – the prevalent impression has been that tragedy did not, because it could not, survive the shift of paradigms. This conclusion, as wrongful as it is superficial, leads me to the following sub-section in which I shall put under scrutiny the issue of the death of tragedy.

2.3 The Death of Tragedy?

As I have shown earlier, the voices calling for moderation in accepting tragedy as an absolute genre were scarcely heard. Nevertheless, the theoreticians of tragedy noticed the discrepancy between the Aristotelian theory enforced by Idealism, and the concrete, tragic dramatic works. Since the predominant sentiment was to follow Aristotle, the most logical conclusion seemed to them to declare tragedy dead. With the demise of ancient civilization myths, too, lost their essentially regulatory role and were believed to have been replaced by (hi)story while their axiomatic mode of cognition was seen to be cast out by the syllogistic rationality. It is, as I argue, on the basis of this chain of misunderstandings that the famous hypothesis about the "death of tragedy" came to being. In this section I maintain, contrary to those scholars, that two propositional mistakes have been made. First, one should not consider *Poetics* as the yard stick for all ages to come and, second, myths should not be the only "stage set" for tragedy.

As an almost self-evident conclusion, after the realization of the scholarly community that the world is no longer the same, came the idea of the death of tragedy. In this way, one of the most conspicuous contemporary theoretical conclusions about

Catharsis

How this "ossification" of the rules worked can be seen by the example of an element of tragedy, catharsis, which is still nowadays considered essential. From the outset, many a scholar has had difficulties with Aristotle's brief and quite obscure definition of the concept. Regardless of the success of the definition, Aristotle's exegetes set it as the *conditio sine qua non* of tragedy. As the theorists of reception have made obvious, catharsis touches upon the planes of production and reception, therefore it should incorporate and account for the changes in society. In other words, it should not remain an ossified remnant of the past but, rather, a lively reference to contemporary audience. Needless to say, paradigmatization of *Poetics* did not allow such "frivolity."

The philosophy of tragedy was developed in tandem with an increased interest in Greek antiquity. In line with the idealistic strain in philosophy, in Classics the process of "normativization" started. Needless to say, this view also influenced the perception of tragedy and its definition. Yet from today's perspective, the romantic view of Greek society, its uniformity and homogeneity are perceived as, at best, naive. As we have seen, contemporary scholarship is not infrequently influenced by this idealist perception. Still, it became obvious that no exclusivist or extreme position can take the centre stage. I suggest that because of this it is impossible today to defend the theoretical correctness of the inalterability of the concept.

Aristotle's original comments on catharsis have been judged to be taxonomically enigmatic.[13] Built right into the main definition of tragedy, as its eighth function, catharsis amounts to "the proper purgation of [...] emotions." When Władysław Tatarkiewicz calls the discussion of catharsis as "brief [...] and obscure" (146), he subsumes the frustrations of many scholars who tried to pinpoint the concept and give it a more firm theoretical grounding with more objective relevance. All their explanatory

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this is not really surprising. For its uniqueness is genuine, and in important ways not transferable" (17).

13 Tatarkiewicz in his *History of Aesthetics I* quotes "a later writer Aristides Quintilian" from the end of the second century A. D. who had described ancient Greek art primarily as "an expression of feeling." Their experiences of different kinds of art were considered to bring them relief. Or, as Tatarkiewicz puts it, "it strove to soothe and pacify feelings or, to use a contemporary expression, to purge souls" (16).

efforts notwithstanding, catharsis remained as mysterious as it had been laid out originally by Aristotle.

Whether catharsis should be understood biologically ("purification *of* the emotions"), psychologically ("purging of the mind *from* those emotions"),[14] or, as in Nietzsche's view, as the intellectual dilemma between "moral or medical phenomena" (106), the fact is that Aristotle in his definition of the genre posited not only its constitutive element but also its function. Not only did he not consider the "essence" of tragedy *per se* but he decided that the outcome, the result of the audience's participation in a tragic *agon*, should become an inseparable part of the genre's definition. By linking together two rather distinct planes of artistic endeavour, production, and reception (the ontological, substantive plane clearly missing), Aristotle considerably increased the complexity if not the opacity of the genre's basic definition.[15]

It would seem that in Aristotle's time the issue of the theoretical validity of reception had not yet been granted any particular significance. It was more or less obvious that given qualitatively good enough stimulants, the audience's reaction would always be "monochromatic" and unified. This conjecture presupposes shared values between the emitter and the receiver of the information. They are both expected to share the same or, at least, a similar system of references, classification of values, in short, similar ontological, cognitive, moral, and eschatological codes. While different genres were considered high– or lowbrow, depending on the kind of emotions they provoked in the public, it was the public that was considered "monolithic."[16] Aristotle's requirement was underscored and, according to contemporary scholarship (cf. Taminiaux 1967), quite heavily idealized by German idealist philosophy. This was the time of the inception of the philosophy of tragedy. This idealist stance came under relentless criticism by Nietzsche who called catharsis "the pathological discharge" thus raising a complaint against a shallow reception of the "primal phenomenon of the tragic" (1999, 106). For

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14 Both quotes Tatarkiewicz 146.

15 Aristotle received a zealous opponent to the concept of catharsis in no other but, again, Nietzsche who maintained that "since the time of Aristotle, no one has yet given an explanation of the effect of tragedy which would permit the conclusion that artistic states were involved, or that the spectators were engaged in aesthetic activity" (1999, 105).

16 In Athens, the audience consisted of only one strata of society – the free citizens of the *polis*.

absolute measure for tragedy at all times.[45] If, in the first place, *Poetics* is understood as a codification of the theory of tragedy and if it is perceived as epistemologically absolute, then the conclusions pertaining to the annihilation of tragedy appear to be the only logical outcome.[46] Secondly, the scholars' perceptions of Aristotle and his analyses are indivisibly tied with their understanding of mythology as the sole backdrop for a true tragedy. Although not described by the philosopher as the one and only world-order in which tragedy can thrive, it has been considered as a *conditio sine qua non* for all tragic dramas and, therefore, at present not sustainable.

New Genres

Regardless, quite a significant number of theoreticians found themselves in a tight spot: tragedy was declared dead yet dramatic works that resembled tragedies kept on being created. They nevertheless felt the urge to overcome the finality of the Aristotelian tragedy. Despite the firm placement of Aristotle's theory in the definition of tragedy many a theoretician tried to overcome the philosopher's totalizing influence on the genre. The most rigorous among these attempts was, as I try to show in the following passage, the formation and introduction of new, parallel genres.[47] Another strategy was to invent a new name for a new content. In such a way, as I demonstrate later, concepts such as bourgeois and liberal tragedies came to being. Another attempt was Benjamin's quite original introduction of the German *Trauerspiel*.

In the literary scholarship on tragedy, since the inception of the "philosophy of tragedy," there have been numerous steps undertaken in order to overcome these significant shortcomings. Instead of the genre of ancient tragedy, different new genres have been suggested, among which a distinctive attention is paid to the mode of irony.

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45 Let me reiterate that Aristotle's study did present an inductive study of a given body of tragic dramatic literature and was less concerned with *die Idee* of the tragic.

46 The problem lies in the logical conclusion, such as John Orr's succinct inference that, "to call drama "tragic" is to posit the continued existence of a particular mode of writing over a period of two-and-a-half thousand years" (xi).

47 Still, all those who negated the survival of tragedy had to change their positions in one case, namely that of Shakespeare. Unfortunately, he was the only author to have been unanimously included among the chosen ones.

Only a few views have been voiced in support of the survival of tragedy, taking into account the mentioned intricacies of the evolutionary changes.

Insofar as the post-Aristotelian approach to tragedy is rigid, indeed, extremely static and resisting the course of time and the novelties that were introduced, its devotees had to make room and account for more modern literary works of dramatic art. One thing was clear however, regardless of what these dramas were, they were not considered true tragedies. This is why scholars had to resort to numerous ways to overcome this state that they saw as a severe deficiency. While some disregarded the entire literary *corpus* after Euripides,[48] negating any tragedy outside the Attic existential experience, a not insignificant number of others invested their attention into creating new genres. As a result, a whole array of parallel genres such as "tragic drama," "tragicomedy," "martyr-drama," *Trauerspiel* etc. came into being.[49]

The group of scholars who have been devoted to Aristotelian theory still had to account for an important exception, namely that of the Elizabethan tragedies. Even the most exclusivist points of view from within this group, their unrelenting stance notwithstanding, allow for the inclusion of Shakespeare's works among the "real" tragedies.[50] In the Renaissance a large-scale production of dramatic texts took place and, hand in hand with it, also their diversification. New artistic movements followed the old ones at an ever increasing rate. By and large, Shakespeare is acknowledged as the only author whose dramas deserve the name tragedies.[51]

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48 Nietzsche, again, for example, maintains that "it was Euripides who fought this death-struggle of tragedy" (1999, 55).

49 This differentiation has allegedly started with the Roman tragedy. Although very close to the Greek world-view, Roman pragmatic society has been placed outside the essentially magical chalk-circle of the Attic mythology. Already Seneca's tragedies are not considered worthy of their Greek models.

50 In his introduction to *The Birth of Tragedy* Raymond Geuss mentions that "in one of the fragmentary notes Nietzsche wrote while working on the preliminary sketches of *The Birth of Tragedy* [...] that Shakespeare is the "musiktreibender Sokrates"." Geuss xxvii. Since, for Nietzsche, musical theatre, and especially Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, was to become the new *entelecheia* or embodiment of tragedy, this has to be, without question, understood as a wholehearted compliment on Nietzsche's part.

51 Yet there are interesting exceptions to this rule. Once again, Marmontel, who appreciated the heritage left to him by both the tragic tradition as well as *La querelle des anciens et des modernes*, concentrated on French tragedy. Albeit mentioning, among other playwrights, also "*Shakeſpear* (Guillaume)" (515 b), he states that "nous avons dans cette matiere deux guides célebres, Ariſtote & le grand Corneille, qui nous éclairent & nous montrent la route" (513 a).

One of the most thorough attempts at introducing a new genre to supplant Attic tragedy was that of Walter Benjamin. The concept of tragedy was, in Benjamin's opinion, reserved only for the Greeks. Therefore he had to come up with a new name: *Trauerspiel*. Still, quite significantly, Benjamin was bothered by the fact that "the *Trauerspiel* of the German baroque appeared to be a caricature of classical tragedy" (1977, 50). On the one hand, he clearly wanted his genre to remain in theoretical and axiological vicinity to the old one, to be the legitimate heir to the latter yet to be significantly dissimilar.[52] Leaving the myth behind, Benjamin understands history as something stationary, something rooted in the singular, present-day moment in the society. There is, according to the scholar, no "essence" of tragedy, wherefore every and all truly artistic works must reflect their own time.[53] Such a conjecture is, quite clearly, a praiseworthy one, if it would not exclude the other side, such as the cross-reaching of human endeavours.[54] No work of art appears from nothing. There are its predecessors and its contemporaries, which is why excluding ones at the expense of the others would hardly do justice to the discussed genre. All this made Benjamin's effort and his novel concept appear rather isolationist.

Benjamin's effort was very much a singular one in the sense that he wanted to eliminate the one and substitute it with the other. A much more widely accepted solution has become the introduction of a relatively parallel genre, that of bourgeois tragedy.[55] This theoretical line does not advocate a complete rejection of the genre but rather suggests a shift in its particular component. In the case of bourgeois tragedy it is the

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Walter Benjamin did not agree with it either. While trying to situate his concept of *Trauerspiel*, in and of itself an autochthonous German word for tragedy, he rejects the concept of Renaissance tragedy by depreciating "the term "Renaissance-tragedy" [which] implies an overestimation of the influence of the Aristotelian doctrine on the drama of the baroque" (1977, 60).

52 At that time, Adorno's negative dialectics with its fine-tuned attitude to unbridgeable differences had not yet been introduced, although it is a question of whether Benjamin would embrace Adorno's hermeneutic tool as a relevant solution to the problem.

53 Benjamin thus posits that "the drama, more than any other literary form, needs a resonance in history" (1977, 48).

54 Benjamin, as it seems, denies the possibility of full understanding of the works from the past. By defending the *Trauerspiel* he posits a claim that it is only the current era which can best understand a work of art. The obvious logical position of this conjecture notwithstanding, it would be hard to maintain that today the Greek or Elizabethan tragedies do not speak to us or that we do not understand them.

55 George Lillo's *The London Merchant: or the History of George Barnwell* (1731) is considered to be the first example of that genre.

change in the type of society to which the new genre refers. Nevertheless, despite keeping the main concept of tragedy present, the new (sub)genres, precisely by the introduction of a new understanding, deny the importance of the ancient genre. By changing it they, in fact, also brush it aside. This novel perception received an important boost in the nineteenth century with the work of Hebbel who, quite ironically, influenced many scholars, for example Lukács, who tried to sustain all connections between the Attic genre and its contemporary successors. Today, Ibsen is regarded as the father of modern (also bourgeois) tragedy. Nonetheless, such a change has an inherent flaw of not being precisely defined, which is why even with regard to this genre scholars rarely see eye to eye. If, for Lukács, bourgeois tragedy was a legitimate legatee of the Greek tragedy, for Eric Bentley it was only a "middle" genre (cf. 1960, 23 *et passim*). For some, such as Williams, the adjective "bourgeois" was pregnant with socio-political meanings, thereby revealing its narrow focus. Not agreeing with its limited scope Williams set out to defend the modern drama in the form of "liberal tragedy" (36 *et passim*).[56]

An extreme attitude, mentioned here only as a curiosity, towards the elaboration of new tragic genres seems to have won the interest of Mark William Roche. Current diversity of the tragic genre can be, according to him, best illustrated by numerous sub-genres of tragedy, such as "the drama of reconciliation," "the tragedy of self-sacrifice," "the tragedy of stubbornness," "the tragedy of opposition," "the tragedy of awareness" etc. Roche is extremely diligent in establishing new sub-genres without any changing the play's constituent parts.[57] Despite all his dauntless efforts, he does not succeed in making the problem any less confusing. Regardless of this conundrum of sundry sub-genres, Roche appears to prefer one term for the present-day plays over all others, that of the "drama of suffering: in this genre the protagonist suffers not of her greatness but owing to weakness or circumstance" (49). Roche's offering of multiplicity, yet preferring only one genre leads the reader to recognize in his theory the Emperor's new clothes. The approach to accommodate a new genre and successfully link it with reality appears to be

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[56] In Williams's opinion, the suggested term covers both realms: present-day political but not restricted to a limited social class on the one hand, and lax or lenient regarding the previously strict rules of tragedy's composition on the other.

a rather myopic one. Considerable harm can be done if one does not recognize the necessity of a steady evolution of artistic expression, the right to evolve, and the evolved reality of the genre.

Irony

Since tragedy, as many scholars maintained, could not retain its elevated character, its only path was to move downward on the evaluative ladder. In this section I attempt to demonstrate how such a stance led the theorists to believe that the high-brow tragedy has been replaced by other low-brow genres, such as tragicomedy, or comedy, which could be brought together under the umbrella of irony. The Canadian theoretician Northrop Frye seems to be particularly convincing in this respect while more moderate appears to be German comparatist Peter Szondi. His is a *geistesgeschichtliche* perspective that tries to found concrete representations on the appropriate theoretical bases. I am inclined to support Szondi's way as the best available because it takes the middle path between the inclusion and the exclusion of these extremes and thus tries to rescue tragedy from the radical hermeneutic exploits.

Within this "reaction" group, that is the one trying to place the contemporary examples of what used to be tragedies into freshly created literary sub-genres, another faction with a slightly different slant should be mentioned. Moreover, its adherents are too numerous not to take note of their arguments. Even though the outcome of their theoretical vision reaches, as in the cases mentioned above, very close to the actual negation of tragedy, it does not overstep this line and remains based on the presumption of some sort of continuation. This prolongation of the genre's existence presupposes in fact a continuation as derision, its continuation with its contrapuntal exposition of contemporary tragedy in a mocked, perhaps even ridiculed way. It may be seen as covering the "middle ground" between negation and affirmation of tragedy. This view is, quite understandably, less diversified than the one mentioned previously. It has been

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[57] These are, judged, of course, according to Aristotle, types of protagonists, conflicts, outcomes, kinds of suffering that befalls the heroes etc.

obvious that the high standards set by the post-Aristotelian exegesis of tragedy were hard to maintain,[58] which is why many scholars preferred to embrace the Aristotelian vision of the genre and negate its natural development alone. Since there was no possibility of having the Greek tragedy revived, let alone raised to the earlier importance, and thus the greatness of the genre has been lost for good, these scholars suggested that contemporary tragedy ought to be transformed into a kind of irony, parody, caricature, sarcasm, or even humour and comedy.[59] Apparently, inhabiting a smaller area, the new tragedy was considered to be a less serious genre. This area has become the one in which both views, negation and affirmation of tragedy, have approached each other, even though their respective outcomes remained different. While, on the one hand, this was seen as the nature of progress, on the other hand these newly established genres provided the incontestable proof of the collapse of tragedy. In this vein, Schopenhauer accused the increased emphasis on the individual perspective in tragedy of disintegrating the gravity of characters and lessening the magnitude of the conflict because "the life of every individual, viewed as a whole and in general, and when only its most significant features are emphasized, is really a tragedy; but gone through in detail it has the character of a comedy" (320). In his view, only the past could afford great moments and the present is always too petty, its problems too trivial to be worthy of being mentioned in a tragic work of art.[60]

A conspicuously all-inclusive application of Aristotelian theory belongs to Northrop Frye. In his *Anatomy of Criticism* he follows the philosopher's classifications of the character types, thus developing the full qualitative array of different versions of

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58 This has been best proved by the French classicist tragedy and its lack of connection with its contemporary society, which has been, not too infrequently, viewed as a paraphrase of the high-brow reality represented by tragedies.

59 Cf. in particular Uwe Japp's *Theorie der Ironie* and Ernst Behler's *Klassische Ironie, romantische Ironie, tragische Ironie*.

60 Nietzsche, for example, says that "someone or other (I do not know who) once remarked that all individuals, as individuals, are comic, and therefore un-tragic; from which one could conclude that the Greeks were quite *incapable* of tolerating any individuals on the tragic stage" (1999, 51). In this Aristotelian vein it has been believed that the greatness of protagonists lies in the general ideals which he/she is struggling for. Conversely, individuality of character lessens the hero's significance. So, could this "someone" have been Schopenhauer or, perhaps, Schiller?

tragedy.[61] It is Aristotle's view on tragedy and epic, or better, on the "different elevations of characters" (Frye 33) that informs the fundament of a new typology. According to Frye, Aristotle's classification descends in five degrees from the most elevated, describing the true tragic characters, down to the lowest stratum, one not even recommendable for tragedies. He connects this taxonomy with the historical stages. In other words, at the beginning, literature was tragic and elevated, whereas its development spiralled down from the heights of tragedy to the abysses of irony and comedy.[62] Based on this presumption, he generalizes it onto the entire literature or "fictions" (ibid., 33) and arrives at the conclusion that "European fiction, during the last fifteen centuries, has steadily moved its center of gravity down the list" (ibid., 34). The latter stands not only for a simple evaluation but, much more significantly, for an evolutionary model. In Frye's view there is only one direction of the development of human endeavours. This is the path of no return, leading only from the elevated to the lower strata.

A much less extreme and also less destructive approach was taken by Peter Szondi. He sees the fertile ground for the continuation of tragedy as irony in the predicament of the "dialektische Auffassung des Tragischen in der nachidealistischen Ära" (1964, 58). With the crisis of the idealist philosophy also its basic concepts became largely problematic. It became obvious that "es nämlich *das* Tragische nicht gibt, nicht zumindest als Wesenheit" (ibid.). By virtue of its character could the tragic remain only "ein Modus, eine bestimmte Weise drohender oder vollzogener Vernichtung, und zwar die dialektische" (ibid.). Szondi sees the dialectic of the tragic concept in the conflict that constantly perpetuates itself. Dialectic movement, if it is truly permanent, looses its one-time fatality, its ancient uniqueness. Thence, "ist dies der Fall, so hat die Vernichtung entweder ein Belangloses zum Gegenstand, das als solches sich der Tragik entzieht und der Komik darbietet, oder die Tragik ist bereits überwunden im Humor, überspielt in der

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61 Frye, interestingly, takes up the opposite stance from that of Hegel or Marx. For Hegel, the development equals the steady advancement of the absolute spirit, while Marx sees in it the progress of economic relations towards the full equality of all people.

62 Still, this is not to say that Aristotle's classification of ancient literary genres does not posses an immanent taxonomy itself, since it places tragedy at the top of the pyramid. Automatically, then, one could suppose that from that peak one can only move downwards, towards epic and comedy. It is possible to say that such a perspective is immanently Aristotelian as well.

Ironie, überholt im Glauben" (ibid.). Once the exceptionality of tragedy is no more, what we are left with defies the purpose.

If the previous prevalent stances of the scholarship on tragedy negated the steady (from the literary, not historical, point of view) continuation of the development of the genre, only a few scholars adopted the argument of its transformation into irony. Clearly, while not negating the changes, they still perceive tragedy as one genre. Significantly different from the first group, which understood new genres as replacements of the Attic tragedy, these researchers consider their contemporary genres as respective current embodiments of only one genre. Even though from afar both approaches may appear similar there is a fundamental difference between them. These views do not see a threshold in the development of tragedy, which, after having been crossed, provides tragedy with different underlying structures, yet the genre's essential tasks remain unchanged. Their presumption is that tragedy, having been established as a concept already by Aristotle, necessarily had to be subject to changes, following those in society as well as in its mechanisms. While the former theoretical approach never could have imagined it possible, this one nurses the idea of the "contemporary" tragedy, understanding it not as a sole matter of the past but of past, present, and future. I have to emphasize that when scholars speak of the "present," they may mean diverse time-lines and historical *topoi*. Contemporaneity is thus a relative entity and refers each time to the theoretician's contemporaneity. Yet what doubtlessly comes across, is the underlying thought that tragedy, even though if not in the same form, survived the changes of time. These scholars share the idea that their present-day tragic dramas are the successors of the ancient tragedies.

Regardless of the fact that the above mentioned theorists were in a majority, there have been those who stood rather alone in their trials to bridge the gap of history and, in some way or another, give a picture of the functionally uninterrupted development of the genre, not through time but as a literary phenomenon. This also meant finding a common denominator according to which the entire medley of tragic plays could be aligned. Frequently enough, this task consisted of significant theoretical removal from the subject in question that, in turn, has been greeted with reproaches of utter idealization and

conceptual isolationism. Despite this frequently fitting criticism, this approach should be credited with an innovative attitude with regard to traditional concepts.

The above accusation can be more easily understood if one mentions that one of the most important thinkers in this strain is Hegel himself, the fact that he founded his philosophy of tragedy on the archaic Greek model notwithstanding.[63] Reluctantly or not, he, too, accepted the perspective that tragedy also exists in its contemporary form, calling it the modern, romantic tragedy.[64] Not forgiving its many shortcomings in relation to the ancient model, he still considered it as the latter's continuation.[65] In fact, it was his idealist system that dictated the inclusion of modern tragedy, since it relied on the presumption of a relentless progress of the absolute spirit; there are no steps back or downward, only forward and upward. This stance helped Hegel to rank his contemporary dramatic works as equal to ancient tragedies. If the Attic drama stressed individuality within the undivided world of substantial values, modern tragedy evolved further towards subjectivity in the realm of totally particularized principles. For this reason Hegel viewed the characteristics of modern tragedy as radically different, indeed opposing to the ancient ones. Crucial for the present discussion, then, is not Hegel's definition of modern tragedy on the *à priori* assumption of its difference from the attic tragedy, but its full acceptance. This is also the reason behind Andrew Cecil Bradley's declaring Hegel the first philosopher after Aristotle who treated tragedy searchingly and originally (1965, 69). This position was similarly endorsed by other Neo-Hegelians, such as Lukács, Rosenzweig.

The essential contemporary theory of tragedy comes form Raymond Williams, a scholar who has to be singled out from among the defenders of modern tragedy. His *Modern Tragedy* presents a landmark in the defense of the current form of the genre. Contrary to Lukács, Williams's approach is historic, stressing the factual and causal

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63 In his famous passage on the axiology of tragedy he chose *Antigone* as "das vortrefflichste, befriedingste Kunstwerk" "der alten und modernen Welt" (II: 568).

64 It is important to note that the romantic tragedy was not a different, new genre without any bearing on the Attic tragedy but, rather, a genre which evolved from the latter and rightfully took its place.

65 Although it is still being maintained that Hegel sided with the ancient tragedy (cf., for example, Plumpe I: 345), an increasing emphasis is given to another train of thought (particularly by Hegel's ciritcs), which is convinced that in the philosopher's opinion both historical forms were rather equivalent.

development of the tragic thought. Williams is very cautious in transferring the specificities of the Aristotelian tragedy into the present, because he knows "it is a question, rather, of realizing that a tradition is not the past, but an interpretation of the past" (1966, 16). Recreation of the "original" Attic tragedy today would be nothing short of an interpretation that should raise alarm with regard to its hasty acceptance.[66] Thus Williams gained the necessary distance for his analyses. Although he is aware that "there has been no re-creation and in effect no reproduction of Greek tragedy, and this is not really surprising. For its uniqueness is genuine, and in important ways not transferable" (17), he recognizes, this time in accord with Lukács,[67] the existence of a modern tragic genre. What Lukács calls "modern," Williams names "the new form of liberal tragedy" (36). In his efforts to remain faithful, yet not servile, to the ancient heritage, he discusses the Aristotelian elements of tragedy translating them into the current heuristic idiom. Williams, too, is after *die Idee*, after the translation of tragedy that would make it appear today. The common denominator of both worlds, Williams suggests, are the concepts of (tragic) order and disorder. This issue is an ancient one since "order, in tragedy, is the result of the action, even where it entirely corresponds, in an abstract way, with a pre-existing conventional belief" (52). Thus he can pay tribute to Aristotle as the *doyen* of tragic theory and also include the irrational dimension of myth. Simultaneously, he claims, the ideas of dis/order pervade our current society, given the permanence of human character. Here Williams exposes the bridge "how firm and general our own ideas of order and disorder are, even though they are oriented to a pervasive individualism, and hardly seem in the same world as the definitions of tragic order and disorder which we have taken from the past and generalized as permanent tragic ideas" (53). In his view there can be no question about the successful correspondence between the past and the present. The problem of Williams's theory, as I see it, lies in the present-day relation to the issue of dis/order. It is only one component in the equation and refers more to the

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66 Whenever there is an interpretation, one should be aware of the possibility of ideology instead of theory wrapped in it. For this particular topic cf. Zima 1989 and 1999, 189-213.

67 He, too, considers both Hegel and Hebbel as essential in the contemporary understanding of tragedy. Hebbel's was "the first theoretical formulation of a subsequently important area of modern drama" (36).

natural, human nature of audience, therefore it is severely limited in its utility for contemporary tragedy as artistic form.

So far it has become on the one hand clear that within the scholarship on tragedy there have been two trains of thought: the denial of the possibility of the modern tragedy's existence with the introduction of new genres or supporting the idea of irony, which all implicitly state that only the Attic version is to be considered the true one, and on the other hand a more lax, permissive, inclusive stance trying to establish bridges connecting theoretically the tradition with the contemporary dramas. It goes without saying that an immense obstacle in the present-day evaluation of tragedy has been the idea of the Attic tragedy as paradigm founded on Aristotelian theory as having survived the shift in the societal paradigms intact. For those theorists who espoused this idea, the idea of the death of tragedy sprang up as a natural and logical consequence. And with the final acceptance of this supposition they were ready to dismiss tragedy *per se* and start looking for new genres. Nonetheless, it is imperative to exercise caution while subsuming divergent theories under these cover-concepts. The discussed concepts are rarely rendered full justice through their generalizations, yet they are necessary in order to contain and delimit the issue and render it usable for a theoretical meta-discourse.

Even today, for those who do not agree with such a brisk dismissal of tragedy in general, there are more questions than definitive answers. If tragedy is still "alive," what form has it taken? Has it remained the same? If not, how did it change? The problems arise from the lack of an updated distinction between tragedy as a literary genre, that is its theoretical visions, and its respective embodiments. As it has been shown theoreticians even today rely on Aristotle's authority.[68] Nonetheless, the philosopher's limitations are more than obvious because the only works he had at hand were Attic tragedies, which is why his newly developed theory effectively amalgamated the empirical material. Still, numerous cases escaped his perspicacious classification already in antiquity.[69] Therefore, with *nolens volens* partisan bias of *Poetics* and with the termination of myth's cohesive

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[68] Cf. the section about myth.

[69] Such are the examples of Aeschylus's *Oresteia's Eumenides*, Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus* and Euripides's *Helen* and *Alcestis*, which are clearly in contradiction with Aristotelian theory.

role, it is impossible to argue substantially for the death of tragedy even though it is, obviously, more than clear that no current tragedy corresponds to the ancient models.

Here lies, it seems, the main problem of the present-day evaluation of tragedy because the definition of the concept has been lost in a multitude of only partially accurate interpretations. Moreover, it is not obvious that every scholar is referring to the same concept hermeneutically.[70] In order to evade the conceptual conundrum while trying to establish the juxtaposition of different terms, it is safe to state that, in fact, not tragedy *per se*, but its Attic concretization is "dead." Without any doubt, the genre has been developing together with the society in which it was created.[71] This split has been noticed by many scholars, most recently by Florence Dupont who offers her emphatic answer with such vehemence that requires a lengthier quotation:

> Ayant utilisé la tragédie grecque pour définir l'essence de la tragédie, les commentateurs retrouvent dans la tragédie grecque tout ce qu'ils en ont tiré et admirent que la tragédie grecque soit si tragique, la plus tragique de toutes. [...] Il faut oser dire que la "tragédie grecque" dont tout le monde parle ingénument n'existe pas, que ce que nous appelons aujourd'hui la "tragédie grecque" est une illusion rétrospective, un artefact de notre histoire littéraire et que sa dénomination même est un serpent qui se mord la queue. Il faut en même temps dénoncer cet abus de langage qui nous fait appeler "tragédies grecques" les textes des poètes tragiques grecs, comme si ces textes se confondaient avec la pratique culturelle, religieuse et sociale que les Grecs désignaient sous le nom de tragédie [...] Finissons-en donc avec la tragédie grecque comme texte lisible et comme incarnation première

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70 What I mean by this is that the concept theorists are using is formally the same yet may be laden with diametrically opposing meaning. This is why, in my opinion, caution with regard to hasty assumptions regarding the concept's meaning is very appropriate. Such a paramount example is the "contemporaneity" of particular scholars – although using the same word, each and every time it means a different time-presence.

71 Changes usually bring about variations of a particular concept and not necessarily new concepts. These may arise after having become distinctly different from the original model. Yet tragedies, in general, did not want to usher in new genres but instead be counted together with the others following the illustrious tradition.

tragedy became the presupposition of the genre's irreversible downfall. Starting with the Renaissance exegetes of Aristotle and ending up with idealist philosophers of tragedy, the theory of tragedy throughout the ages required the genre to follow the philosopher's paradigm, which, already after the demise of the ancient societal structures, such as social, political, economic, and religious, was hardly a feasible demand. The end of tragedy has been, therefore, as good as accomplished.

The fiercest modern-age critic of the new ways has been, as I have already mentioned, Friedrich Nietzsche who accused rationality in its conceptual Socratic thinking of destroying tragedy's pre-civilizational conditions. Even though somewhat different from what Nietzsche supposed, rationality did play a seminal role in the development and the seeming demise of the genre. For Nietzsche, it was Socrates's ferocious attack on the sublime art of tragedy, he calls it the "aesthetic Socratism" (1999, 62), that brought tragedy to the brink of destruction.[38] He accuses the rationality, that is conceptual thinking, for wiping out the original pre-conceptual, mythical conditions in which, according to Nietzsche, tragedy thrived.[39] The main attack was directed against the known world-order and, as we learn from Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, against gods.[40] The newer attitude thus preferred knowledge over feelings, noetic analysis over lived experience, consequent and rigorous rationality over impulsive and capricious emotiveness. In the world where everything down to the last element has to be rationalized and intellectually proven, gods have little space to dwell.[41]

In the beginning, rationality appeared to be optimistic and "subservient" to art, yet it soon proved to be all-powerful and controlling. Aristotle's commentators saw rationality as a welcome remedy for the absence of myth, as a proxy for the ancient

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38 Interestingly, the contemporaries of Socrates, such as Aristophanes in *Clouds* (423 B.C.) and in *Lysistrata* (411 B.C.), saw the philosopher as another sophist, a topic worthy only of histrionic derision.

39 Interestingly, Nietzsche was not alone in this supposition. Almost three decades earlier Hebbel blamed the devolution of tragedy on rationality. The first crisis, he claims, was to be seen "bei den *Alten*, als die antike Weltanschauung aus ihrer ursprünglichen Naivetät in das sie zunächst auflockernde und dann zerstörende Moment der Reflexion überging" (4).

40 Founded or not, such has been Meletus's fiercest accusation of Socrates in front of the Athenians.

41 As a proof for his theory, Nietzsche quoted Plato's opinion that "virtue is knowledge; sin is only committed out of ignorance; the virtuous man is a happy man" (1999, 70), further concluding on his own that "in these three basic forms of optimism lies the death of tragedy" (ibid.).

transcendence.[42] It has been, I think quite erroneously, widely accepted that the automatic consequence of this split meant the beginning of the end of tragedy. This culminated in the common supposition that "what is not clear [...] is why the ancient Greeks, of whichever epoch, excelled in the art to a degree *unsurpassed since*" (emphasis added).[43] This not-so-innocent declaration of Attic primacy with regard to tragedy hides two obvious, yet not necessarily automatically deducible, hypotheses. Firstly, the only true tragedies were written in ancient Greece, and secondly, if this "excellence" (even if it is not known why) is *à priori* accepted, the qualities of subsequent tragic dramas become necessarily questionable.[44] This is why we have to return to the questions surrounding the death and/or survival of tragedy.

Yet, one might object, the benefit of "absolutization" of Aristotle's work was precisely the preservation of tragedy in this philosophical rational tradition for, and this is not an exaggeration, all ages to come. His systematic rational mind produced probably the most venerated theoretical book about literature, *The Poetics*. For him, after having seemingly successfully bridged the gap between the reality and its artistic representation, the rational approach could, through its support, only reinforce art. Little did he know how ruthlessly correct his cogitations would prove to be. The unchangeable character of Aristotelian theory throughout time proved to be momentuous for all subsequent scholarship on tragedy; it was only later that the undestanding and carving of the philosopher's ideas "in stone" produced such an unsurpassable obstacle to the idea of the survival of the genre. Therefore my reading of the problem suggests two propositional mistakes or, at least, not necessarily accurate conclusions. These ideas are, as I have laid out previously, founded precisely on the premise of accepting Aristotle's *Poetics* as the

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42 Lukács, later followed by Benjamin, in his discussion of the ancient tragedy claimed that in the modern age history took the place of ancient myth.

43 Stith Thomson and John Gassner, eds. *Our Heritage of World Literature*. Dryden Press, New York 1946, 135. Quoted in Kaelin 88.

44 As an early example of the first group can be quoted Marmontel, the author of the entries on theatre in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, who in his note on tragedy, lashed out at all consequent tragedies since "d'un autre côté cependant, ... les autres qui ſont venus après, n'ont pu y ajouter que des rafinemens capables d'abâtardir ce genre, en voulant lui donner un air de nouveauté" (513 b).

interconnected, which is another reason why tragedy even today cannot be proclaimed dead. Both components meet neither on the plane of myth or history, nor is catharsis the key ingredient. Instead, I am convinced that the hub of contemporary tragedy has to be sought in the protagonist, that is in the subject. This issue will be discussed in the following two chapters.

Our discussion about the possibility of the death of tragedy has brought us back to the question of the purpose of the genre and to the celebrated Platonic dilemma about the correspondence between reality and art that, despite Aristotle's valiant efforts, has obviously not yet been satisfactorily resolved. Societies did evolve and tragedy with them, yet the problem remains unchanged: does the tragic relate to our lives at all? How does art represent this tragic? If the concept of tragic cannot be analyzed separately from the platform of existence on the one hand, yet cannot be zealously overestimated and absolutized on the other, does there exist, then, the middle path in which art will keep its necessary distance and, thus, also independence?

The question about the significance of the tragic for the artistic rendering of reality remains. In order to understand the dynamics of art, and consequently tragedy, it is necessary to grasp their relationship to the outside world. Concealed behind this issue is the question about the capacity of art to symbolize reality as well as about its role within contemporary society. The historic shift between the two has become obvious: if in antiquity reality was contained in myth, then today, with myth dissolved, only reality remains.[74]

Tragedy, being fundamentally a histrionic art, has to be removed from the essentially physical and concrete "living the tragedy." This fact leads me to maintain that when one says "life is tragic," one does not mean the same kind of tragic that is performed in theatre. Although the tragic of tragedy does rely on the same standards as the tragic of life (it mimics the latter), the conceptual difference between the two,

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[74] Life without metaphysics prompted many, as has been shown above, to call existence ironic.

between the *Idee* and its representation cannot be effaced. Thus, I believe, not the whole life is tragic, but only certain situations that occur in it deserve that classification.[75]

Soon after what Szondi calls the "philosophy of tragedy" had evolved, Arthur Schopenhauer paid much attention to this essential relation and his philosophical views on tragedy had long lasting implications. In his opinion, the main purpose of tragedy is "the description of the terrible side of life" (252). For him, tragedy was endowed with particular importance since it has both a hermeneutic function and a utilitarian character. The fundamental role of tragedy is to reveal the sense and the essence of existence, in other words, to deal with reality's epistemological and ontological realms. Yet, as I see it, by putting tragedy on a pedestal Schopenhauer caused the absolutization not of the genre itself, but of its function. He does not consider tragedy the outcome of reality but, quite to the contrary, life should be understood through its mediation. Put differently, in his view, tragedy does not only illuminate reality but, much more, it rather establishes it for us.[76] With his supposition of existence whose absolute tragic is, in his opinion, well evidenced, the condition is met also for reconnecting tragedy with the Christian doctrine of the original sin.[77] In Schopenhauer's case, this connection between life and art, typical for the early idealist stages of the philosophy of tragedy, may be put into relief. He noted that "the true sense of the tragedy is the deeper insight that what the hero atones for is not his own particular sins, but original sin, in other words, the guilt of existence itself" (254).[78] The original sin as a seminal element of tragedy stands surety for the inclusion of the genre in his contemporary reality. What used to be wrapped in the idea of myth, now gets its full rendition within the Christian theodicy. Yet this was not the tragedy itself he

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75 The human psyche, sadly, tends to pay more credibility to a singular case of suffering than to a large number or group (cf. Williams 61-84). It can accept and digest only a certain amount of a stimulant. What goes beyond its receptive capabilities is lost. It is easier for a singular member of the audience, a spectator, to identify with an individual than with an amorphous crowd.

76 It is from tragedy, in his view, that we learned about reality, because in it "is to be found a significant hint as to the nature of the world and of existence" (253).

77 Needless to say, his theory found many followers. Nietzsche and Williams were among the most instrumental.

78 For an additional historical weight and a fitting illustration he also quotes Calderón's lines from *La vida es sueño*: "Pues el delito mayor / del hombre es de haber nacido" (254). This stance makes Schopenhauer an existentialist *avant la lettre*.

applauded but, rather, its rendition of tragic reality.[79] That, in turn, would allow for blending the historically different concepts of tragedy, totally subjecting art to life.[80] The conclusion of his attempt is as simple as it is obvious: if reality turns tragic, humans either all live the tragedy, or there is none. Schopenhauer failed to keep the tragic genre independent from reality that ultimately brought it down.[81]

A resonant voice that cut into this general aura of indecision was that of Georg Lukács. Tragedy, in his opinion belongs not to the realm of life but to that of art.[82] Lukács allowed for the changing of tragedy since its Attic apogee because he saw it conditioned in its artistic strength by reality.[83] In ancient times myth was the common denominator of the entire Attic society, in which there was no need for separation. With myth doomed, Lukács cannot help but assert that "das Leben als Stoff ist nicht mehr dramatisch, wie es zu früheren Zeiten gewesen ist" (1981, 113).[84] Together with the mythical conditions their direct dramaticality is also dissolved, so that there "besteht nicht mehr die Möglichkeit, daß das zeitlos Poetische und das erregend aktuell Empfundene in naiver Synthese verschmelzen" (1981, 115). They were supposed to assist each other, yet Lukács claims this union suddenly lost its appeal. Succinctly put, "das neue Leben hat kein Pathos" (1981, 113).

Although tragedy, in keeping with his logic, should have been pronounced dead, he still perceives a possibility of a merger between the two as essential. Both tragedy and

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79 Nietzsche, too, follows in Schopenhauer's footsteps with regard to the relationship between tragedy and existence. This is especially obvious in a familiar tale about Silenus who, after having been captured by King Midas, scathingly addresses humanity as "wretched, ephemeral race, children of chance and tribulation, why do you force me to tell you the very thing which it would be most profitable for you *not* to hear? The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon" (1999, 23). The passage is taken from Aristotle's dialogue *Eudemos*.

80 If life is tragic in itself, then there is no need for tragedy. The "city section" of any newspaper should suffice.

81 Following Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Miguel de Unamuno's basic postulates are that "the real, the really real, is irrational," that "consciousness is a disease," and that "life is contradiction" (14). Unamuno, like Kierkegaard, takes an almost decadent, diseased pleasure in preserving these hypotheses. In modern times he has a worthy follower in one of the members of the group of "famous Rumanians" (Eugène Ionesco, Mircea Eliade, Constantin Noica), Emil Cioran, hailed as the "philosopher of death", the "poet of suicide".

82 For Lukács, tragedy is "das *Symbol* des ganzes Lebens" (1981, 170, emphasis added).

83 That despite the claims by "the enemies of drama … that it [tragedy] is a falsification of reality"(1974, 152).

reality have to stay in relation with each other, but still manage to retain their respective autonomies. It is essential that "die Themata der Tragödien in einer künstlichen Distanz vom Leben gehalten werden müssen" (1981, 114). Yet there is more behind this statement than meets the eye. The distance between them, Lukács claims, is "artificial" because "jede Tragödie hat das Pathos des Lebens stilisiert" (1981, 114). Along these lines, life can be truly represented only by an autonomous tragedy. At the same time, life in its totality still has bearing on the artistic interpretation, only their unconditional sameness changed. By virtue of this autonomy, modern tragedy is again prepared to take on itself the burden of becoming a symbol.

Yet in modern times also the requirements for symbols changed. Consequently, for Lukács, "das Tragische wird ausschließlich zum Gesichtspunkt" (1981, 116). Bourgeois tragedy is missing both the ethical (Aristotle) and the aesthetic (Nietzsche) perspective.[85] Lukács did not bring his two realizations together to envisage that this precisely is the ground on which a full-fledged modern tragedy can be grounded. It is the "view-point" that presupposes immanent changeability, which is not in line with the meaning of symbol as a permanent value. Yet tragedy still renders reality in its contemporary contingency. Modern relativity notwithstanding, the independence of art does not mean separation from reality, but merely its autonomy. Modern art has to dissociate itself from any absolute symbolic in order to grasp fully the changeable reality. Consequently, the "view-point" is the only possible modern version of the ancient symbol. In order to correspond to reality, the modern "symbol" ~~had to~~ renounce its totality. Still, this does not mean that the view-point refers to life in a less comprehensive way. Art, or so it seems, is not only a mirror of reality but its independent and, at the same time, comprehensive rendition. Or, as Lukács himself puts it, "tragedy is the most real life that is" (1974, 156). This argument of tragedy as modern "symbol," has since lost little power.

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84 Cf. similar conclusion on page 115.

85 The theoretical basis for his theory can be seen in Scheler's statement from 1915 that "in einem wertfreien Universum … gibt es keine Tragödien" (1955, 153), which leads to his question "how justified are we in accepting that what people describe as tragic *is* tragic?" (Quoted in Benjamin 1977, 38).

Walter Benjamin, in a similar way to that of Lukács, stronlgy defended the independence of art from reality. Because, in his view, neither antiquity nor subsequent periods were able to create an adequate artistic response to reality, Benjamin decided to develop his own genre, that is *Trauerspiel* in opposition to the Attic tragedy. The fundamental line of the ancient tragedy is its primarily ethical *modus operandi*. The entire tradition of the tragic thought exhibits the objective framework for tragedy. And that, Benjamin claims, is already beyond the reach of art. The gist of the Attic tragedy is the tragic objectivity which, such as any other objectivity, is an issue dealt with by philosophy. Because at stake is not merely a theoretical construct, as Nietzsche would have it, but much more, namely the truth. Truth has had, Benjamin asserts, a particular position, because "knowledge is open to question, but truth is not [...] As a unity of essence rather than a conceptual unity, truth is beyond all question" (1977, 30). The concentration of the tragedy around the question of truth, at the same time, distances it from reality, makes it absolute, and non-responsive to life. The one to blame, according to Benjamin, is precisely the philosophy of tragedy, which "has been developed as a theory of the moral order of the world, without any reference to historical content, in a system of generalized sentiments, which [...] was logically supported by the concepts "guilt" and "atonement"" (1977, 100-1).[86]

On the other hand, Benjamin rejects attempts to discard this shortcoming. Especially negative is his attitude towards Nietzsche's idea of art's absolute autonomy. Although free from the ethical objectification, it loses, in Nietzsche's rendition, any commonality with reality. Thus, Benjamin claims, the tragic myth embodied by tragedy is in Nietzsche's system a "purely aesthetic creation" (1977, 102). In this aesthetic sphere occur the interactions between the Dionysiac and the Apolline. The elevation of one realm means the sinking of others, therefore limiting the scope of tragic works of art. Benjamin argues against Nietzsche's pretence totality.[87]

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[86] Here Benjamin undermines Unamuno's euphoric collating of philosophy and poetry.

[87] Or, with Benjamin's own words, "where art so firmly occupies the center of existence as to make man one of its manifestations instead of recognizing him above all as its basis, to see man's existence as the eternal subject of its own creations instead of recognizing him as its own creator, then all sane reflection is at an end" (1972, 103).

Now it is not difficult to pinpoint the direction of Benjamin's argument. Radically rebuffing the extremes, he tries to take a middle path of reconciliation, which, he thinks, can be found, after rejecting the continuation of the Attic tragedy, only in the contemporary tragic form of *Trauerspiel*. The tragic is a concept both linked to reflection (philosophy), and implanted in everyday life (history). Both the ancient tragedy and Nietzsche focused excessively on the philosophical side, the former on the ethical and the latter on the aesthetic one. At the same time, the tragic is not predominantly historical either. This would mean that life is primarily tragic in itself, which is a stance Benjamin is not eager to defend.[88] His rejection of this view is essential. The tragic is neither a uniquely aesthetic nor solely ethical concept, nor can it serve as an ontological foundation of reality.[89] The tragic revealed by *Trauerspiel*[90] is at a distance from them because it encompasses them all.[91] If it closes up on any of them, art loses its autonomy. And vice versa, "the more significant the object, the more detached the reflexion must be" (29). That, detached in the sense of objectivity, is not distance. The capacity of art to convey a truthful message about the reality may only be preserved by the distance from the latter.

A very original analysis in terms of the relationship between art and life has been offered by Karl Jaspers who seems to take up the issues left behind by his predecessors. He suggests a triadic approach to the questions of tragedy, in which one "must [...] distinguish, first, tragic reality as such; second, tragic knowledge as the conscious recognition of this reality; third, the philosophy of the tragic" (1953, 97). Truly important for the investigation of tragedy is, according to Jaspers, the relation between the latter two concepts, the "tragic knowledge," and "philosophy of the tragic." He particularly

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88 This statement was later repeated by Wilkoszewska: "we may ... doubt whether what we call the tragic is inherent in the structure of the world itself" (28).

89 Benjamin goes to great pains to prove that each effort to absolutize the concept of the tragic reveals itself as a "thoroughly vain attempt to present the tragic as something universally human" (1977, 101). He also harshly criticizes Johannes Volkelt who in 1917 published his *Ästhetik des Tragischen* which "rests on the assumption that the tragic can be unconditionally presented in certain arrangements of facts such as occur in everyday life" (ibid.).

90 Interestingly enough, *Trauerspiel* remained on the one hand very German in its origin, and on the other a typically Benjaminian term in its application. It has not been adopted in its large meaning of "contemporary tragedy" by any scholar, either his contemporary or subsequent. Despite Benjamin's intentions and best efforts to offer a substitute for tragedy, the term remained quite idiosyncratic and quite narrowly usable.

favours the former because "knowledge of the tragic becomes itself a basic feature of tragic reality" (1953, 90). For a short period, the tragic knowledge appeared to be the miracle cure for the ailing theory of tragedy. Still, it is hardly less true that when carried to its logical end, his concept of knowledge seems incapable of successfully mediating between tragic reality and philosophy. Jaspers has to concede that it comes up against the basic impossibility to reach the truth. Since the truth cannot be grasped, no tool, no matter how sophisticated it might be, can do the work. Thus Jaspers has to realize that "tragic knowledge [...] has its limits: it achieves no comprehensive interpretation of the world" (1953, 99).

An exceptionally influential endeavor to rescue the tragedy from its demise was Raymond Williams's *Modern Tragedy*. It is one of the most comprehensive descriptions of the relation between reality and art, also in favour of modern tragedy. As a social theoretician, Williams developed his theory of tragedy (and the tragic) not on the basis of its ontological value but rather based on its teleological function, that is its accordance with reality, its representational function (Jakobson) as a function of live/d experience. Williams relates:

> I saw a terrifying loss of connection between men, and even between father and son: a loss of connection which was, however, a particular social and historical fact [...] I have known this tragedy more widely since. I have seen [...] men and women broken by the pressure to accept this as normal, and by the deferment and corrosion of hope and desire (13).

For this reason, tragedy is present in our lives as a contingency. Even though it seems as if Williams were trying to make reality appear tragic, he nonetheless stops short of following in the footsteps of Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and, for that matter, also Cioran. To exist or, in Heideggerian terminology, to be thrown into being, does not necessarily mean that we partake in experiencing of the tragic side of life, "but where the suffering is felt, where it is taken into the person of another, we are clearly within the possible dimensions of tragedy" (47). This is why life is not tragic *per se*, but

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[91] Benjamin maintains that "the modern theatre has nothing to show which remotely resembles the tragedy of the Greeks" (1977, 101).

one of its particular and hardly avoidable characteristics may turn it into such. Still, one could concur, there is scarcely a period in either social history or individual life without occurrences necessitating or provoking suffering. How is tragedy then to be understood if life is persistently filled with more or less tragic accidents?

Any discussion of contemporary tragedy has to make references to the Attic paradigm and, it is my belief, realize its inadequacy to be applied across the ages.[92] Many a thinker therefore rejected such an absolute vision of tragedy and in place of an all-controlling theoretical discourse that introduced a much more tangible and workable concept of "reality." Tragedy had to be wrested from the dictate of its universalist past and connected to the concreteness of the living.[93] Not only does Williams see the opposition between the theoretical/universal and concrete/particular, he also sees it in terms of a conflict between the (dogmatic) past and the (pragmatic) present. Lest tragedy wither away or even be declared dead,[94] he wants tragedy to be directly connected with the realm from which it derives, that is with life. Either by the deductive or, in Williams's case, inductive process, there is an immanent danger of seeing more than meets the eye, thus losing perspective.[95]

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92 For the longest time it was not theory of tragedy that the theoreticians bent in order to accommodate reality but, rather, life had to be made to fit the theory. This conclusion shows the essential primacy of theory over its concrete embodiments in plays.

93 In this sense Williams is no exception. He admits that "tragedy is … not a single and permanent kind of fact, but a series of experiences and conventions and institutions … The universalist character of most tragic theory is then at the opposite pole from our necessary interest" (45-6).

94 Williams's text may be seen as a direct reply to Steiner's proclamation of tragedy's death. How successful he has been, has Steiner himself shown in his article from 1990. Although courteously bowing to each other's direction, both scholars remained firmly seated on their respective banks.

95 Precisely this issue has been raised by Benjamin who scathingly remarks that "the attempts to define ideas inductively – according to their range – on the basis of popular linguistic usage, in order then to proceed to the investigation of the essence of what has been thus defined, can lead nowhere" (1977, 38-9). This opinion also has been shared by Miller. In his words "when Mr. B., while walking down the street, is struck on the head by a falling piano, the newspapers call this a tragedy … What the death of Mr. B. does not arouse is the tragic feeling" (1978a, 9). Even if the event in itself may have been tragic, it does not reveal that quality for us, the audience. Miller has been committed to the ethical reading of the tragedy because it provides us with knowledge which "is knowledge pertaining to the right way of living in the world. [Yet] The manner of Mr. B.'s death was not such as to illustrate any principle of living" (ibid.).

Having arrived quite close to the full establishment of modern tragedy, Williams falters because he emphasizes more the social than the individual realm.[96] Concrete though his efforts were, Williams could not escape the other trap: putting life in the place of a universal theory turned it automatically into a universal category. The consequence of Williams's ideas is the realization that the tragic in and of itself can only be uniquely individual. It is this element, as I shall try to prove at a later point, that was essential for Williams's rescue operation. Modern tragedy can start its own existence only when it is related to the present reality. Therefore, there is no possible way to assert that the tragic is a quality of life *per se*. The claim Williams emphatically underscored was his contention about the immanent tragicality of life. Yet in his discussion of the tragic there are mute spots to which he turns a deaf ear, admitting that "we cannot recognize" a tragedy on a larger scale (which would otherwise be totally in line with his argument) as tragic. Thus, Williams's role in reestablishing tragedy in the modern world notwithstanding, the discrepancies in his theory remained.

Once again, we are confronted with two issues with regard to the survival of tragedy: the concepts of a tragedy lived (reality) and tragedy viewed (art). Although both planes, the real and the artistic in tragedy, should evolve according to the same rules, their seminal dissimilarity lies in our perception. Our comprehension of the tragic depends on the distance we assume. In other words, for a more comprehensive view of the tragic one has to be detached and at a distance from it.[97] If in mythical antiquity, the main societal paradigm was believed to be that of identification, because there had been no other possible existence, then in the modern era, particularly in Postmodernism, the model has become that of dissociation. Its individualism and advanced egotism work against any association whatsoever, be that on the individual level or on other levels.

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[96] Williams confirms this by saying that "the most influential kinds of explicitly social thinking have often rejected tragedy as in itself defeatist" (63), and also that "the idea of tragedy, in its ordinary [that is Attic] form, excludes in particular that tragic experience which is social" (64).

[97] As an effective illustration I may use the way of reception of the Kantian concept of sublime as it was conceived in his *Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment*. Since "we call sublime that which is absolutely great" (131), it stands surety for our own feelings of inadequacy, smallness, and fragility. Yet we can evaluate, not to say enjoy, these examples of the powers of nature only under condition that our own existence is not in danger. This view-point is introduced by Wilkoszewska who says that

It is hoped that this argument as well as the above examples, which opposed the extremes, that is harnessing of life on the one hand and/or its expansion on the other, provide enough proof for underscoring the importance of the differentiation between the tragedy in life and tragedy in theatre, that is between the experiencing of tragedy and the aesthetic reception of this experience.[98] When they are not subsumed under one all-encompassing myth in reality, it is clear that the straightforward equation of life and art cannot endure and should leave the latter out of it. Also, this does not correspond to their factual relation.[99] It is my supposition that modern tragedy can be appreciated not only through the identification with life (as it was, through the perspective of the hero, claimed by Aristotle) but also, contrarily, through the distancing from it onto the pure plane of art.

In other words, even today tragedy can be defined following the middle path between its absolutization (idealist system imposed over reality) and the admission of its utter contingency (that life *per se* is tragic). This middle path should become obvious during the course of the following two theoretical chapters that deal with the concept of subject on the one hand and the tragic situation on the other. For now, suffice it to say that this objection is not aimed at destroying the connection between reality and art, thus turning the mimetic principle of verisimilitude into a Nietzschean arbitrary concept. On the contrary, it is to underscore their interconnectedness, their immersion into each other while maintaining their own characteristics.[100] The truth is that the "tragic poetry," based on an inductive pattern, synecdochically mimics the real world. Both planes are similar to the point of being identical, yet they are not the same. One should keep in mind their similarities as well as their differences. Such a stance will enable us to be "interested less in tragedy's changing form than in its enduring substance" (Berlin, x) and, consequently,

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"in the tragic experience one cannot be a spectator – unless it is the aesthetic experience of the tragic, possible through art." (32).

98 Wilkoszewska, in a similar vein, maintains that "when posing the question about how the tragic structure is shaped on the basis of the contradiction of the world given in experience, we would vainly seek the answer by trying to fathom the nature of that very contradiction, given in experience" (30).

99 Susanne Langer, when talking about both tragedy and comedy, concedes that "both are created forms, artistic or symbolic expressions of human destiny, not depictions of the real world" (436).

100 With S. H. Butcher's words, "the ideal is the real, but rid of contradictions, unfolding itself according to the laws of its own being, apart from alien influences and the disturbances of chance" (151).

in its active and fulfilling role in rendering of contemporary reality. Tragedy as genre and as artistic device is not "dead."

The paramount concern with regard to tragedy, as mentioned in the discussion of Williams's theoretical discussions, is the protagonist. S/he, in fact, presents the gist of the hermeneutical maze since it is the hero's role in the drama to literally and metaphorically hold all threads in his/her hands. The role of protagonist is to mediate between art and reality. All basic tragic concepts are linked to the protagonist who also represents basically the medium in which internal artistic forms and external reality meet. Because "isn't the global claim that tragedy is no longer possible [...] a gross simplification that ignores complex facets of reality?"[101]

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[101] Roche 32.

3. CHARACTER

In the preceding chapter my goal was to establish the theoretical point of departure for the discussion of contemporary tragic theory and dramatic works. It serves as a short historical developmental overview with seminal questions posed along the way. I drew attention to the rigid employment of Aristotelian *Poetics* throughout the ages and, based on this realization, also to show how, in order to revive tragedy, this constricting view could be adapted. Due to structural limitation of the dissertation, I was limited in the choice of how many relevant issues could be addressed. These issues are the paradigmatization of Aristotle's theory by his Renaissance and Neo-classical successors; the establishment of the philosophy of tragedy by early Romantic scholars and German philosophers of Idealism; their adherence to the idea of the Attic society as enclosed and total in itself, therefore perceived by the ancient society and its mythical realm as interchangeable. As I further argued, all this led to theoretical protectionism, which barred later scholars of tragedy from applying the theory to their contemporary form of the genre that continued to develop regardless of the state of the theory. Since this proved an impossible task, as a consequence what appeared were the ideas of the death of tragedy. Reluctant to declare the genre's demise, many tried to sidestep this logical conclusion with the introduction of new (sub)genres. Regardless of their attempts, it is safe to posit a general claim that the concept of tragedy remained sidetracked for quite a long time.

I discussed also the relationship between reality and art, on the basis of which I investigated how tragedy as an artform fundamentally pertains to life. Already from the outset one can see that its death seems, therefore, rather improbable. In the following chapter I change the perspective. Since the antiquity, society has gone through so many radical changes that to claim that tragedy should remain the same appears to be a gross neglect of facts. The main focus of this chapter and also the entire dissertation is, for that reason, the concept, which Descartes moved into the limelight of conceptual thinking and which has retained this position since. It became especially important in idealist philosophy, which founded on it, among others, its theory of tragedy. Thus, the following

chapter discusses the question of the subject in its role as dramatic character throughout its long history. Furthermore, it is my belief, that it is in the subject that reality and art meet. In addition, I believe that any and all tragic occurrences are essentially individual events, justifying the focus on the subject.

More than any other genre, with the exception of, perhaps, lyrical poetry, tragedy as a genre depends on the concept of the subject. It is, in fact, defined by it, that is, by the dramatic character. In the following section I shall provide a short historical overview, stressing the issues that seem indispensable for my argument. I cannot stress enough how our contemporary understanding of the issue of character depends on Aristotle and the idealist interpretations of Aristotle's thought, despite the attempts since 1980-ies to reevaluate Aristotle's position.[1] Therefore, in the first section, I challenge their view on the ancient tragic characters because for the idealists ancient character was already a fully independent individual. I see this as an untenable statement since, as I show later, the degree of the character's "liberation" was much smaller, if present at all, than that of post-Cartesian subjectivity. In order to elucidate this stance, I discuss in the first sub-section the character as Aristotle and the Idealists saw it in its public guise. The public quality hindered the character from turning *into itself* and thus becoming a full contemporary subjectivity. The first dramatic character that can claim his ontological independence is perceived to be Shakespeare's Hamlet, a view I also endorse.

In the next section I delineate the reasons for the birth of the new autonomous subject. The question arises as to when this seminal transformation occurred. There are many scholarly opinions, but the most probable seems the one that ascribes the actual transformation to the Renaissance artists and Descartes. I explore the changes that influenced the development of tragedy so much. As the following sub-section demonstrates, the dramatic protagonist, given the alterations in the philosophical comprehension of the self, transformed itself from a public into a private entity.

The following section of this chapter is devoted to German Idealism, the essential period in establishing the tragic subjectivity as the fundament for the genre. This question

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[1] Among others, the names such as C. Belsey, T. J. Reiss, J. P. Vernant, and P. Vidal-Naquet should be mentioned here.

du tragique, comme miracle de l'esprit humain et mystère d'éternité (14-15).

To claim radically that the Greek tragedy is completely out of place is a rather bold statement for Attic tragedy has nevertheless been the first canonized genre.[72] Therefore, the appropriate way is not rejection and exclusion but, rather, understanding and inclusion. Still, the influence of tragedy should not stretch without obstacles across history as if it were applicable to any and every period.

In short, the ancient tragedy and its Aristotelian hermeneutics have to be taken for what they are: the origin of an extraordinary dramatic literary genre as well as its extremely insightful theory that spawned one of the most illustrious traditions in both practice and theory of literature. By paying this tribute to contemporary plays, however, one does not succumb to individual vanity and negate the importance of the past nor does one fall victim to their idolization. There should be absolutely no doubt that tragedy survived, albeit not in its original Attic form.[73]

2.4 Tragedy: Art versus Reality

The concluding part of Chapter 2 harks back to the relationship between tragedy and reality, that is to the question of art and reality. Through the examples of many scholars I tried to underscore the discrepancies among them and among their theories. It is obvious that the "quarrel" about the death of tragedy has not brought us to any clear conclusion. The elemental point is that, regardless of how one chooses to look at it, the relationship between the two mentioned concepts cannot be eradicated. Given the previous discussion, it is clear that the middle path seems to be the most appropriate. While we cannot discard reality as unimportant for art, it is at the same time difficult to maintain that art is nothing but rendering of "life." Both elements are essentially

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[72] It is also unclear whether this is a positive argument in the contemporary world of inexhaustible axiological and existential libertinism.

[73] Friedrich Dürrenmatt approached tragedy from a pragmatic viewpoint, namely, "nevertheless, "the tragic element"' is still possible, even if pure tragedy is not" (81-82).

requires a more in-depth analysis because contemporary discourse on tragedy has been dominated, either positively or negatively, by the idealist philosophical orientation. All the above notwithstanding, the most instrumental in restoring tragedy to the pedestal was Hegel. However, his is a rather tenuous position. While, on the one hand, he tried valiantly to make tragedy fit his comprehensive idealist schema of the world, he did not see the seemingly historical need for the destruction of the genre. Quite to the contrary, he was among the very few who endorsed the holistic continuing perspective. The danger associated with these absolute speculations is that, on a certain level, the idealist philosophers turned certain tragic concepts, such as catharsis, into even greater absolutes than these concepts deserved, rendering tragedy, while still taking care of the genre on the theoretical level, quite a grave disservice in the more pragmatic sense.

An example of this is the form of the subjective awareness, another seminal issue introduced into the discourse on tragedy by Idealism, is discussed in the next sub-section. The main function of the self-recognition was perceived in the establishment and proof of the absolute autonomy of the subject. The new center of gravity also required a complete shift in the emphasis from Aristotelian action to the modern-era subjectivity. Therefore, it was only to the tragic subjects that Hegel allowed the highest degree of self-awareness. Needless to say, it was this issue that post-Hegelian critics first dismantled. The next sub-section presents Hebbel, a pragmatist as well as a theoretician of tragedy and one of the first critics of Hegel, who very soon accomplished an exceptional feat with regard to the modernization of tragedy. His vision exposed the tragic subject to the conflict. What Hamlet, for example, showed in practice with his internal doubt, Hebbel later established in theory. Among other critics, the following section discusses philosophers of the subject, such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard.

The short overview of the development of the subject both in and out of tragedy concludes with the last section of this chapter. There I discuss developments in the twentieth century and its general artistic current, Modernism. In a very short time, the Idealist stances came to naught. Instead of fixed absolutes, a completely opposing relativistic value-system was introduced. It is more than obvious that such a zealous theoretical climate presented quite a disadvantage for a non-biased evaluation of tragedy. The results of this utterly contingent perspective are therefore laid out in the last sub-

section, in which I discuss the issue of the subjective drama. With plays such as those by Beckett the disintegration of dramatic genre was thought to be complete and irreversible. With that tragedy and perhaps drama in general found themselves on the brink of the abyss. It is in the following chapter that I conclude my theoretical ruminations with the argument about drama (tragedy) and subject in Postmodernism.

Since this chapter discusses the issue of dramatic character, one has to return to the source of its codification, that is Aristotle's *Poetics*. The first obstacle lies in the philosopher's choice of action instead of character for the main concept of Attic tragedy. I intend to show how Aristotle's choice was time- and function-specific and that with the changes in society this relation was also altered.

The discussion of tragedy thus far has been general, touching upon the historical development of the genre as well as the source of its concepts and, consequently, its function in art and society. Yet no analysis could even attempt to be complete without delving deeper into the structure of the subject-matter, without touching upon the key ingredient of the genre, which, in the case of art, is the "carrier" of feelings, impressions, thoughts and, in drama, actions, thus making it the "mediator" instrumental in linking the aesthetic realm of the play with the reality of the outside world, and therefore with the concept of the dramatic character.[2] A hero as the carrier of a character-trait embodies the aspect through which tragedy is anchored in the world or, in Fuchs's words, the ""character" as a term of dramatic art can never be independent of contemporary constructions of subjectivity" (8). It is through this instance that any and every identification of the audience with the tragic heroes occurs and consequently bridges the chasm between art and reality. The understanding of this bridging may reap various and perhaps even opposing results yet, regardless of whether life is considered tragic or not, regardless of whether it refers to larger social schemes or not, one thing appears to be sure: both the tragic experience (of the hero) and the aesthetic experience (of the

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[2] For Aristotle, character meant rather a quality of the tragic hero rather than the person itself. He says that "by character I mean that in virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents" (1951, 1950a, 25). In Scaliger's Latin translation, for example, *ethe* appear as *mores*. It was only later, following the metonymical transfer, that the name spread from the qualities to their carrier, hence "dramatic character". Needless to say, it has become the cause of many an erroneous subsequent interpretation which is why great caution has to be exercised in discussing the concept.

audience) of the tragic occurrence are necessarily individual, even singular events. As I showed in the previous chapter, the common spirit that had been ascribed to tragedy becomes meaningful only when the individual experience is totally negated. As it will become clear in this chapter, based on this experience, subjectivity was wrested away from the ball and chain of the all-inclusive absolute and instead moved towards cognitive and deontological autonomy.[3]

The traditional scholarship on tragedy has adhered to the belief that all the genre's elements have been defined together with tragedy. I have shown so far the inadequacy of the conviction that the form of the genre is unchangeable. Therefore, it appears that it is the constituent parts that frame the general picture of the artistic form. This is why the idea of the dramatic character should not be simply equated with tragedy *pars pro toto* even though its theoretical conception is connected to the concept of tragedy. Tragedy does not define the characters but, conversely, is itself defined by them. This chapter will be devoted to the discussion of the main intricacies in the process of the becoming of character and of its becoming an independent instance.

So far I have argued for what might be called a "linear" development of tragedy. I have demonstrated that even if the form was altered, its content would remain the same. Now, the attention will focus on the development of the subject as a character. On the basis of the following discussion, the fundamental discrepancy in contemporary scholarship between the rather conservative Aristotelian idea of tragedy and a quite contemporary condition of its essential element, the character, will become even more conspicuous. Furthermore, through this realization I shall lay the groundwork for the "modernization," that is the revival of the notion of tragedy with respect to the concept of character. Prior to doing so, I shall attempt to present a brief development of character from its theoretical, that is conceptual point of view and to sketch the basic changes that the concept has undergone. Throughout this chapter, I shall also try to touch upon the

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[3] In the discussion of the modern drama, Lukács insists that "die Hauptfrage jedes Nachdenkens über das Drama dies geworden ist: Wie gelangt der Mensch zur tragischen Tat?" (1981, 88). Even though his question reveals a modern-era bent with the character in the center, this problem has embodied the key issue of tragedy since its inception.

relationship between art and life, its mirroring in the genre, thus bringing the issue in question to the doorstep of our contemporary postmodern reality.

The dilemma between the action and the character has its roots in the age-old argument about their primacy in tragedy or, in other words, in the subsequent impasse with regard to the dominance of the whole or of one of its ingredients. Since the invention of the modern idea of the subject and the appreciation of the individual, the notion of subjectivity as the hub of both ontological as well as epistemological planes has been perceived as the natural, in fact, the only possible form of the concept. This was not the case prior to this change. Initiated by Aristotle himself, the argument about the primacy can be tracked even in contemporary scholarship. Aristotle's position is that "tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life" (1951, 1950a, 27),[4] and he adamantly asserts that "without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character" (1951, 1950a, 27). This once again indicates the nature of *Poetics*, which is set as an *ex post* and not an *à priori* analysis. The theory was, in its subsequent interpretations, understood as more than obvious support for action at the expense of character. Even though early exegetes, such as Scaliger and Castelvetro, and later luminaries including Corneille and Diderot, had already questioned Aristotle's infallibility, the philosopher's authority remained untouchable. The chasm between the two was opened and what Asmuth calls "der Rangstreit zwischen Handlung und Charakteren" (135) developed. This debate has not even today been resolved yet because many scholars treat the question of subjectivity on the same level as other issues, such as catharsis, myth, the rule of the three unities, etc.

While trying to imagine why Aristotle privileges action, it becomes clear that, for him, the actual outcome of the tragedy is more important than its potentiality. He appears

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[4] At present, process philosophy identifies a modern-era subject as resulting from a process. According to Rescher, "as process philosophy sees it, the unity of a person resides neither in the physical body as such nor in the psychic unity of custom and memory but in a synoptic unity of process" (107-08) or, in other words, "the unity of person in a unity of experience" (108). Despite the adamant affirmation about the importance of the process, that is its deontological nature, it is not clear how, in comparison with the traditional philosophy, it should be regarded since, according to Dewey, the "temporal seriality is the very essence, then, of the human individual" (108-09). By trying to bring the present-day issues onto the plane of the traditional philosophical concepts it seems that they, at the same time, remove their "mobility" and versatility.

to be mistrustful with regard to a character's stability of mind and devotion to his/her cause.[5] Yet that the problem lies much deeper than this. As has become obvious in the earlier discussion of myth, Aristotle could only have placed so much emphasis on character as had been allowed (or was possible to imagine) within the ancient metaphysical structure of society. Characters in Greek antiquity, before they were "liberated" from the mythical world-view, have not even been taken into consideration as full subjectivities.[6] Consequently, because there was no full subjective consciousness *à priori*, there could be no tragic hero *per se*. Only the character unwaveringly making his/her way through the maze of mundane distractions, faithfully following what the transcendence (or, in Hegelian terms, substantiality) has posited on him/her becomes, in Aristotle's eyes, in deemed worthy of being called a tragic hero.[7] The heroes' tragicality is incrementally accomplished solely during their ordeals. Therefore, it cannot be assigned to the heroes ahead of time but only, at best, during the action or *ex post*, that is, once they have avowed their character through their actions and remained faithful to their tragic ideal. Action, in turn, is the only proof, the sole litmus test for the tragicality of the hero's character and thus the final instrument of arbitration.

Aristotle's decision not to buttress character's essential autonomy was obviously corroborated by the ancient inclusion of a tragic hero into the mythical world.[8] This means that an ontologically independent hero simply had not been available, and moreover, was not even conceivable in Aristotle's period.[9] Regardless, this definition shared the destiny of the majority of other Aristotelian definitions and was, similarly,

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5 Such an example may be John Jones's book *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* published in 1967 where he avers that according to Aristotle "the stage-figures do not act in order to represent their characters; they include their characters for the sake of their actions" (30).

6 Antigone is an excellent example: she has no other option but to abide by eternal laws. Even if she wanted to act differently she could not. Her "free will" is only an imaginary one.

7 John Jones would cap it off by saying that "by the erosive flow of action the individual features are carved out" (36).

8 Langer, in her discussion of fate, supports this stance by stating that "fate in tragedy is the created form, the virtual future as an accomplished whole. [...] That virtual future has the form of a completely individualized, and therefore mortal, life – a measured life, to be exhausted in a small span of time" (360). Clearly, it is imperative not to confound individualization with autonomy. Even though they sound like tautologies one should be careful to keep and to understand them as separate.

9 As Langer would again put it, "tragedy can arise and flourish only where people are aware of individual life as an end in itself, and as a measure of other things" (354).

elevated to the level of law and as such perpetuated throughout its history.[10] The termination of myth's importance also resulted in the transformation of this view for our own contemporary comprehension of character is based, as I shall show later, on the concept of subject as developed from the early modern period.

3.1 Dramatic Character as Individual Entity

Even today scholarship on tragedy cannot wrest itself from under the influence of idealist theory of the genre. Therefore, generalized views on ancient dramatic characters are quite ubiquitous. Dramatic characters were thus thought to have been established by external factors, linking and liking them inextricably to their environment. In other words, ancient tragic protagonists were an integral part of the Attic worldview. Contrary to that, I argue that these ancient characters were, in comparison with the modern heroes, blindfolded and one-sided.

In the previous chapter the relation between the ancient world and its art, particularly the link between tragedy and myth, was depicted, which is why the particular features of ancient characters have become evident. In order to evaluate this uniqueness correctly and not confuse it with the later modern-era's fully developed autonomous subject, the ancient individual entity has to be considered separately by paying full attention to its specificities. Hegel, the torch-bearer of the objective German Idealism would, in support of Aristotle, claims "denn zum wahrhaft *tragischen* Handeln ist es notwendig, daß bereits das Prinzip der *individuellen* Freiheit und Selbstständigkeit oder wenigstens die Selbstbestimmung [...] erwacht sei" (II: 557).[11] What is needed for tragic action is little more than "individual freedom and independence" that guarantee a hero his/her cognitive, ethical, and teleological autonomy, in fact, all except the ontological one. The difference between the ancient individualized hero and the modern-era

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[10] Bernhard Asmuth has been remarkably conscientious in tracing all the ebbs of theory with regard to this question. Cf. especially 135-141.

subjectivized character is that the former exists as a singular entity yet is viewed, simultaneously, as an essential part of the picture of the world. Nevertheless, being a part of the entire scheme of the mythological world, he/she is singled out and allowed a different, predominantly independent existence. This individual reality is of paramount importance for Hegel because it carries "die *subjektive* Innerlichkeit" (II: 557), part of the substantial, and represents the unbreakable link between the personal and absolute realms, which, in turn, enable the totality of ancient tragedy. Thus, the individual character as it appears in antiquity is analogous to what Benjamin calls "the heroic self," because it "is not a character-trait, but the historical-philosophical signature of the hero" (1977, 110).[12]

Since the characters in ancient dramas are unconditionally established by external factors, it is obvious that there is no ontological autonomy and also less existential "mobility" or freedom available to them. This is a topic that which has been to some extent described already in the section on myth.[13] These characters cannot but absolutely identify with the "task" they have been burdened with, such as Oedipus's royal task of saving the city from the plague or Antigone's paying final respect to her brother. This is the reason for their exposition as individuals, that is as singular carriers of their goals. The "program," or goal they have to fulfill, is their "pathos." It is an individually assigned absolute task that has to be accomplished. Yet the characters cannot make up their own minds whether or not to assume this task. They not only feel this pathos but, identifying their own personalities with it, also automatically appropriate it as their own.[14] In fact, they "gerade dieser Charakter, dieses Pathos sind" (Hegel II: 565).[15]

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11 Hegel further writes that "den eigentlichen Beginn der dramatischen Poesie haben wir deshalb bei den *Griechen* aufzusuchen, bei denen überhaupt das Prinzip der freien Individualität die Vollendung der klassischen Kunstform zum erstenmal möglich macht" (II: 558).

12 Williams, supporting Hegel in this instance, maintains for example that "in tragedy [...] both the individual aims and the consequent conflict are substantive and essential" (33). Clearly, the link between the substantive and individual realms here is very speculative, idealistic and takes away from contemporary tragedy more than it brings to its acknowledgement.

13 Hegel, for example, sees it as a free, that is, a consciously willing adoption of the substantive ideals by the subject, namely "in betreff auf die Handlung [kann] das Individuum her nur insoweit hervortreten, als es die freie Lebendigkeit des substantiellen Gehalts menschlicher Zwecke unmittelbar erfordet" (II: 558).

14 There may be some exceptions to this rule, though. All Oedipus tries to do is to run away from the destiny that has been foretold and, yet, it is precisely this flight that brings him into a position of

Plumpe fully agrees with Hegel, since they are the "Einssein des Willens mit dem gewollten Zweck" (I: 347) or, better yet, that the "unreflektierte Identität von Person und Zweck unterscheidet das "heroische" Subjekt von jeder modernen Subjektivität" (ibid.).

The partial limitation of tragic characters does not make them ethically weak or insufficient, though. Within mythological reality, they are convinced that it is their own decision that makes them take certain paths and they are not at mercy of destiny.[16] Still, in comparison with their modern counterparts, that they are to a crucial degree blindfolded. On the level of their own existence, they do not sway in their decisions. This is a character-trait that has been hailed as one of the most important ancient characteristics. It was linked with the "grandeur," the social positioning of characters, and for this reason secured by Aristotle's successors as a necessary condition. This explains the primary reason why Aristotle chose kings, queens, and noble heroes to embody the functions of ancient tragic characters. The reach and scope of these characters were such as to demand a more thorough and faithful compliance with the values they presented.[17] This totalizing character-trait does not allow for the modern-era's self-conscious realization of one's own actions. The ancient, full individual awareness appears thus as only a pretence, even though Aristotle employed it in a way similar to contemporary modern consciousness. Put differently, the ancient individuality cannot match modern subjectivity.

While commenting on the nature of virtuous action, Aristotle brings in a man saying that "first he must act with knowledge; secondly he must deliberately choose the act, and choose it for its own sake; and thirdly the act must spring from a fixed and permanent disposition of character" (1968, 1105 a-b, 85). Viewed from our contemporary

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committing the prophesied atrocities. Had he been asked to make an informed and independent choice he would have, as many a place in *Oedipus the King* indicate, turned it down without much further ado.

15 Hegel reaffirms this by stating that "das eben ist die Stärke der großen Charaktere, daß sie nicht wählen, sondern durch und durch von Hause aus das *sind*, was sie wollen und vollbringen" (II: 565-66).

16 Cf. such ancient tragic characters as Antigone, Medea, Electra, Prometheus etc.

17 Aristotle sets out four basic conditions in respect of character: firstly, "it must be good," secondly, there is its "propriety" (Else's translation gives it as "appropriateness"), thirdly, it "must be true to life," and the last "point is consistency" (1951, 53). Much later, within the realm of modern

perspective, this passage presupposes free will. Yet as we have seen, in ancient myths there was no free will (in our modern sense of the word) because the individual depended on metaphysics. In all likelihood, there appears to be a slight inconsistency in the definition; therefore one should exercise extreme caution in taking for granted and putting together the concepts of such as "knowledge," "deliberate choice of act," and "fixed and permanent" character. What for Aristotle appeared as a complete subjectivity, in the course of time by virtue of the essential shift in the perception of character, comes across as a limited, partial individuality.

The issue of "consistency," and "one-sidedness," apart from revealing the heroes' status, their greatness, their consequent suffering and death, invites questions concerning their guilt, that is, their full, conscious, undeniable and undenied responsibility for their undertakings.[18] In and of itself, the partiality of tragic characters enhances the doubt about their full moral liability even though it has been suggested and strenuously supported already by Aristotle who maintained that "we must try to show that our man acts by moral choice" (1968, 40).[19] Again, this moral choice is acceptable in so far as one agrees with the characters' individual autonomy within the absolute dependence on the mythological world-view.

Interestingly enough, the difficulties encountered in the theoretical portraying of characters were already noted by Aristotle himself. While setting up the above-mentioned rules for the construction of a character in tragedy, Aristotle forthrightly admits that "the tragedies of most of our modern poets fail in the rendering of character" (1951, 1450a, 27). This realization, in turn, cannot but invite questions about the functional capacity of Aristotelian characters and, consequently, put the entire subsequent scholarship regarding the dramatic character in a different perspective. Furthermore, Aristotle's questioning in the first instance bears witness to the characters' limited possibilities.

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subjectivity, "consistency" has been perceived in a different way. Hegel, for example, saw it as a "verleztende [...] Einseitigkeit" (II: 550).

18 This supposition, in turn, opens a Pandora's box on the subject of the tragic guilt. Since it is too expansive to be dealt with here, I would mention only Hegel's Pythian opinion on this issue that "die tragischen Heroen sind ebenso schuldig als unschuldig" (II: 565).

19 This dilemma ended up being classified as the famous "tragic guilt" which was a particularly popular topic of romanticism as well as with the German philosophers of tragedy, most notably Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and others.

Public quality

Because of the described one-sidedness of ancient dramatic characters their main function was seen as a public one. The environment and the protagonist were believed to be inseparable. Moreover, the character of Attic protagonists was charged with a symbolic function, which meant that these heroes could not stand just for their individual selves.

The shift to the subjective paradigm as well as its collective implications should also be considered with regard to its societal function. This is understood as the relation of the individual to his/her society. The behaviour of the individual in Attic society, which also resulted in a similarly individual dramatic representation, had been defined by the mythical realm. My argument concerning the dramatic hero was derived from the presumption that protagonists in drama constituted an indivisible part of the milieu and that, regardless of their actions, the heroes belonged to the all-encompassing picture of the world or, in other words, their function was predominantly community oriented. Williams astutely describes this only seeming independence of Attic characters exceptionally well. In the ancient world, "at most, the individual could act by choice within limits set by the powers beyond him. The ground of tragic action, therefore, was the operation of these powers in a particular case. However powerfully or closely realized the particular case might be, it remained in this sense exemplary" (20-21).

Once again, the explicitly public character of ancient heroes proves that the Attic tragic heroes were not individual agents concerned with their personal gains. On the contrary, they were conceived to personify values that entire populaces perceived as theirs, which they fought and, consequently, died for because "the content of the hero's achievements belongs to the community" (Benjamin 1977, 108).

It has so far become clear that modern dramatic characters, romantic as well as contemporary, may hold a very similar, if not the same status as their ancient counterparts. Regardless of their differences in the understanding of their essences, they

have the same task and, therefore, act similarly. This is why they should be considered individual but still public characters, singled out from *demos* yet still under its control.[20] The ancient individual character relates more to the singularity of the concept, regardless of its metaphysical contextualization, since there was no concept of subjectivity in antiquity. This individual already stands for a singularly emphasized entity within the society. The similarity is not diminished by the fact that ancient Greeks were quite *incapable* of thinking about subjects on the tragic stage, because "das Prinzip der griechischen Welt konnte noch nicht das Prinzip der subjektiven Reflexion ertragen."[21] Although the ancient world-view was limited to mythology and therefore there was no need for an ontologically-independent subject, their collective transcendental orientation and social function also remained the same.

A clear understanding of what came to be recognized as the "essence" of ancient dramatic heroes is of paramount importance for the ensuing discussion because the period of antiquity, with its unique social, political, economic, religious, and philosophical conditions, was never to be experienced again. In order to have the clearest possible delineation of the concept of character, I have limited the discussion of its ancient form to its public individual traits, whereas for its subsequent embodiments I shall suggest the use of the term "subject." My argument presumes the lines of gradual evolution and not abrupt revolutionary leaps from one world-view to another. Therefore, this approach runs the risk of falling into many traps, the most dangerous of which is the assumption of a one and the same meaning for a particular concept in different periods.[22] This is why in the discussion of the modern-era idea of subject, extreme caution is needed in order to differentiate and justly evaluate the qualities of those changes.

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20 This should not, of course, be confused with the modern subjective individual of whom Klaus-Jürgen Bruder says that "der Begriff des Individuums ist selbst ein moderner Begriff" (38).

21 Hegel. *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*. Jubiläums-ausgabe, Vol. 2, 119f (quoted in Szondi 1964, 55).

22 Such is, for example, Louis Althusser's use of both mentioned concepts. In his theory, stemming from what Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut call "la pensée 68," he uses the subject only in one of its two basic meanings, that is that of "sub-iectum", sub-jected concept when talking about the late-modern disintegration of the subject. Hence, for him, the subject is something weak and incapacitated, whereas the individual is the carrier of all the idealistically conditioned values. Thus, when he talks about the transformation of individual into subject, his view can only be applied to the postmodern

3.2 Dramatic Character as Autonomous Subject

Change

The main question is thus when and how did the change from the symbolic to the pragmatic function of the character occur? The main dividing line, as it is perceived today, is considered to have taken place in the Renaissance, yet it was Descartes who established a new independent philosophical concept. Nonetheless, it is important to notice that an essential condition for such a change was provided with the ending of the pantheistic mythology and the rise of Christianity along with the idea of humanity as the best and most advanced feat of God's creation. With Humanism the hub of conceptual activity moved from the metaphysical spheres into our human selves. For this reason, as I argue here, the character was united with his/her action and became his/her own center of gravity.[23]

After what has been said, the question arises as to the temporal placement of the change from individual to subject. It is safe to say that for the most part, theorists agree about the transformation that took place with the full deployment of the Renaissance and humanistic world-view in Europe. In the realm of the arts, the change appears to have occurred earlier than in the realm of conceptual thinking, that is philosophy. In its first phase, Renaissance art of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had already hailed the liberation of man in all its forms, from intellectual to hedonistic. Elizabethan tragedy, specifically Shakespeare would be classed as, of course, its paramount example.[24] Such was not, unfortunately, the case of philosophical endeavours that were, at the time, still deeply involved with as well as influenced by age-old scholastic thinking. There was an attempt to pull down the structure of the scholastic world by using exactly the same concepts it had been built from. Nicholas Cusanus, Leonardo da Vinci, and even Albrecht Dürer may serve as examples of such thinkers, the Reformationers may be another. It was

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period for which it was meant and not for the entire evolutionary history of the concept across the board. Cf. also Critchley 1996, 25.

23 As an essential reference on the subject of subject cf. Badiou's *Théorie du sujet*.

not until the second phase of the modern age, that is the seventeenth century, that independent thought acquired the depth and breadth be capable of developing and sustaining larger philosophical systems. In addition to the scholastic heritage, new paths were forged that were never to be abandoned again. The key personalities of this period were René Descartes in philosophy and Galileo Galilei in the sciences.[25]

Shakespeare, other than the Attic tragedians, is considered to be the only playwright whose works are even today, almost without disputation, acclaimed as true tragedies, in fact, the only tragedies of the modern-era. Even when scholars argue about the inclusion of, for example, French Neo-Classicists into this group, Shakespeare still enjoys wide-spread support and is viewed as the key tragic author of modernity regardless of the fact that his works are considered dissimilar, to say the least, from those of the Greeks.[26] In general, scholarly thought appears not to be bothered by the apparent incongruity and illogicality of the modern-era's sense of character and tragicality. Although critically disposed to tragicality, Fuchs, for example, maintains that "in contrast to the Greek roles, the inexhaustibility of Shakespeare's tragic roles lies in the permission they give actors to make new wholes of the feeling and thinking dimensions suggested by the text" (25).[27] This statement leaves much to be hoped for with regard to conceptual clarity, particularly as to what exactly these "new wholes" are supposed to mean. Moreover, the conundrum is even more complicated since, with Critchley, "the modern philosophical use of the word *subject* as the conscious or thinking subject, as self or ego, as that to which representations are attributed or predicated (the subject as the subject of representation) first appears in the English language as late as 1796" (1996, 13-14). Regardless, Hamlet is generally viewed as the first and foremost tragic hero of modern

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24 Friedrich Hebbel's assertion, for example, was that "das Shakespearesche Drama entwickelte sich am Protestantismus und emanzipierte das Individuum" (4).

25 A very thorough account of Cartesian philosophy can be found in Luc Nancy's *Ego sum*.

26 Asmuth repeats the opinion of many a scholar with regard to Shakespeare's works as "character tragedies" (135).

27 The expansive agreement on the issue of Renaissance subjectivity is shown precisely in these Fuchs's words which, quite surprisingly, echo Hegel's stance. He writes, "denn was allegemeinen, anhaltenden, tiefen dramatischen Effekt macht, ist nur das Substantielle im Handeln: als bestimmter Inhalt das Sittliche, als formell die Größe des Geistes und Charakters, in welcher wiederum Shakespeare hervorragt" (II: 527-28).

times, most deservingly exposed and elevated to the level of a symbol himself.[28] Needless to say, his self-doubting qualities are hailed as the essence of the cognitive paradigm of the modern-era. Yet I have to argue that, in a sense, he is not a symbol of anything but himself. With this significant shift, the condition is met for the theory of tragedy to venture in a new direction.[29]

Even though the idea of the appearance of the liberated subjectivity in the Renaissance may seem to us quite plausible if not completely true, a large gap exists between the inception of the modern-era subject and the gradual disappearance of the ancient world. The period in between is that of the Middle Ages. Some supporters of the "Renaissance theory" have taken this fact into account although this inclusion of the Christian Middle Ages resulted in no new revelations. When discussing Medieval theatre, Williams, for example, maintains that "in none of the literature created within this complex, however, was the origin of a change in condition primarily assigned to what we now call individual character" (20). His statement does not fall short of joining the Medieval period with the ancient one.[30] Hebbel, too, in Bentley's view, shared this opinion:

> Hebbel is the first great dramatic critic and practitioner to show the explicit influence of that historical imagination which is one of the great novelties of modern times. [...] Great drama, he maintained, occurred at the transition from one epoch to the next and expressed the clash of *Weltanschauungen* –

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28 A rather outspoken opposition to this prevalent stance has been mounted by Lionel Abel. In his *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* he rhetorically poses a question as to whether "could Shakespeare's *Hamlet* have been a tragedy?" (41). In answering it a few pages later he writes that "T. S. Eliot judged *Hamlet* a defective tragedy. He was right; as tragedy it is defective. He was wrong, though, in judging the play as tragedy" (57).

29 This happened long before the subject as the basis of ontology as well as gnoseology was questioned in Modernism. What was necessary for these consequent doubts to emerge was, as we shall see later, the fragmentation and defeat of German idealism, most notably Hegel's thought. As a consequence of these doubts, radical questions, such as this by Critchley, emerged, namely "has there ever existed a unified conscious subject, a watertight Cartesian ego? Or is the subject some phantasy or abstraction that is retrospectively attributed to a past that one wants either to exceed, betray or ignore?" (1996, 22).

30 Despite Williams's attention paid to the proper and transparent use of terms, he commits an error here which is not that uncommon. Supposing that the "individual character" is an obvious technical term, he does not go to great lengths to define or, at least, clarify it. In respect to this question, the problem appears to be less striking since the vast majority of scholars agree with the above presuppositions.

appears also in drama: the ancient hero as an individual had a false illusion of being in control of his/her existence, of arriving at conclusions independently and, most importantly, of performing actions in an autonomous way. All this had, fully and absolutely, become so with the formation and establishment of the new concept. During the Middle Ages this autonomy was still severely, and in many cases even totally, limited but Shakespeare and Descartes pushed it into the main stream again. Clearly, the later form of what Williams calls the "individual character" (20) comprises in itself also its former appearance, or, as Zima, in a slightly modified nomenclature, would have it, "wir haben es hier mit einer Wechselbeziehung zwischen *Individualität als sozialer Physis und Potentialität* einerseits und *Subjektivität als Verwirklichung dieser Potentialität* im Sprechen und Handeln andererseits zu tun. In diesem Kontext wäre das *individuelle Subjekt* als *dynamische Einheit von Individualität and Subjektivität* zu denken" (2000, 21).[36]

It is more than obvious that the *locus* of happening, the hub of modern-era activities is not an external plane between humans and some transcendental forces but, conversely, very much an internal(ized) one. Moreover, the modern world would be unimaginable without this unification of the ontological and gnoseological functions of one and the same entity. Adorno provides a good description: "Ort von Erfahrung in allen bestehenden Gesellschaften sind die Monaden. Weil Individuation, samt dem Leiden, das sie involviert, gesellschaftliches Gesetz ist, wird einzig individuell Gesellschaft erfahrbar. Die Substruktion eines unmittelbaren Kollektivsubjekts wäre erschlichen und verurteilte das Kunstwerk zur Unwahrheit, weil sie ihm die einzige Möglichkeit von Erfahrung entzöge, die heute offen ist" (1973, 385). It would not be wise to expect art to be any different, which means we have come full circle and now emphasize – for very obvious reasons – that the model hero of this new era is nobody else but Hamlet, the embodiment of personal doubts, insecurities, conscious meanderings, and contingency of existence.[37]

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36 Cf. also Zima, *Ideologie und Theorie*, ch. 1.

37 Plumpe is on the mark in describing the character of modern dramatic heroes of whom Hamlet may be seen as the forefather. He argues that in modern theatre "der kognitive Habitus ersetzt, den normativen. "Lernen" aber ist "prosaisch": Das Subjekt ist mit seinem haltgebenden Zweck nicht mehr eins; es ist vielmehr disponiert, sich situationsbezogen und elastisch zu verhalten, sich

As a result of the previous discussion and of the clash between the characters and their actions, the concepts cannot be treated otherwise than by acknowledging their interrelatedness. This brings us back to Aristotle's seeming division between character and action. The reasons laid out above should convince us that there is already more to Aristotle's theory than meets the eye. I find it hard to agree with the superficially obvious conclusion derived from Aristotle's writings that the hero's character, *ethos*, is not – or, for that matter, is less essential for the *denouement* of tragedy. Although this is a possible reading of Aristotle, to accuse the philosopher of depreciating character completely seems to me too hasty an assumption. Aristotle can be, conversely, read as suggesting a path that is distant from any extremes and on which character is not eliminated and discarded but "comes as a subsidiary to the actions" (1951, 1950a, 27). It can be therefore understood as the "flip-side" of the coin. This evidence is provided only by a hero's every consecutive move that, in turn, can only be based on his/her character. A hero's character *per se*, and here I would agree with Aristotle, is nothing but a possibility, a pure contingency. There may be some indication but no proof of its decisiveness or its resoluteness. Simply, the characters prove themselves through actions. This approach may therefore appease both sides: the "pro-action" theorists can be satisfied with the idea that through the actions the heroes undertake, they also develop their own characters. Contrarily, the "pro-character" scholars should be pacified with the idea that action appears to be the outcome of the hero's characters yet is, at the same time, its "living" confirmation.

The reason behind Aristotle's strict insistence on action seems to me, clearly, to be the quality of dramatic character. The action has to be a total product of a hero's character that, in turn, cannot but deliver exactly this type of action.[38] There should be no discrepancy between the two. This fundamental "unity in difference" can be also seen in Aristotle's exegesis of tragedy. In a manner befitting the Sphinx, Aristotle very perceptively stops short of equating tragedy with its action because the distinction

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überzeugen zu lassen, der Welt ihr Recht zu geben. Der Heros rennt mit dem Kopf gegen die Tür, während der gelehringe Moderne sie öffnet" (I: 352).

38 Schopenhauer, in his description of the action as a time-space phenomenon, adds a comment about causality being a consequence of this action and thus reveals its importance for Aristotle's argument.

between the two is still elemental: tragedy, as he sees it, is the imitation of an action and, as has become obvious above, real-life action cannot be equated with its aesthetic (artistic) rendition.[39] Yet even though tragedy gets a softer treatment as only an imitation of the true reality, its characters and their actions have to be as truthful and realistic as possible. There should be no mistake in the actor's interpretation of the hero's character because any mistake would result in rendering the entire imitation of an action untrustworthy and false. And vice versa, the action should be consistent to the utmost degree since any failure would render the character untrustworthy. In other words, even though tragedy is only an artistic imitation, in order to be taken seriously, that is as having any relation to lived reality at all, it has to be as accurate as true life.[40] Seen from this perspective, the unity of action comes across as the unity of character or, in other words, there can be no unity of action unless the hero's character is unified in itself as well. Moreover, with the internalization of the subject's plane of conflict and action, this dilemma of duality ceases to demand theoreticians' attention. Needless to say, even today the Aristotelian argument has lost little of its persuasiveness.

When the state of society in antiquity is taken into account, it becomes obvious that there has been a major shift in the understanding of character since that time. The autonomous qualities of the individual have been discovered and bolstered, which has resulted in a totally different grasp of the concept. In Asmuth's words, this reveals "eine gegenteilige Praxis" (135). Although there have been different answers provided in different times with regard to the relationship between character and action, it is safe to say that, in general, with the arrival of the modern era, a newly conceived subjectivity deposed the preceding "monopoly" of the pro-action Aristotelian theory.[41] The hero emerged as an independent subject.

As a consequence, it is possible to generalize that people in their lives as well as in their artistic endeavours were left to themselves with no metaphysical or eschatological protective cushioning. Or, better still, once systemic doubt has been introduced, no metaphysics can mend the newly opened gap. Lukács, for example, successfully

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39 This concept has been later, on the basis of Scheler, aptly taken up by Wilkoszewska among others.
40 This is why sometimes there may be a direct link in the theoretical discussion of the two.

underscored this idea by saying that "wenn es keine Mythologie gibt [...] muß alles aus dem Charakter heraus begründet werden" (1981, 118). The major shift occurred on the plane between the individual and the world. It was no longer enough for an individual to be solely singled out, to be nothing but a distinguished member of a larger group; he/she had to become an opinion-forming, decision-making, consequences-foreseeing, in short, all-responsible individual. The new individual already belonged to the type of the "modern" subject. As Zima sees it, "das Individuum als individuelles Subjekt, das eigene Meinungen äußert, Verantwortungen trägt, Dissens anmeldet und autonom handelt, hat es nicht immer gegeben. In archaischen Gesellschaften ging und geht der Einzelne im kollektiv praktizierten Mythos [...] auf" (2000, 4).

Since subjects irretrievably lost the illusion of being an integral part of the surrounding world, they had to conceive of a new system with themselves in the center.[42] Everything had to be defined anew.[43] The phenomenal, in Nietzsche's wording, took over the universal, thus paving the way for particularization, the matchlessness of the subject, and, as a consequence, the inimitability of their existence. For an increasing majority of scholars, this loss of connection has opened a road towards the apriorism, the "liberation" from an oppressive and delimiting system of control. Thus was mapped out the path that came to an end much later with the subject's total solipsism in Postmodernism. This will be my concern in the third chapter.

What exactly happened during the process of the emancipation of the subject is the topic of the following sub-section. Here I draw attention to the concept of the "world

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41 Cf. Asmuth 135 *et passim*.

42 Drakakis and Conn Liebler, for example, when discussing our contemporary theory, perceive the subject as the hub of the present-day scholarship: "a central issue for modern critical theory involves the construction of the tragic subject as "hero", and its definition within a range of social, political, sexual, moral, ethical, philosophical, cultural and aesthetic discourses" (2). Their conclusion, as much as it wants to pertain only to contemporaneity, can be easily extended over the entire development of the modern-era subject.

43 The necessity of the new definition was also realized by Lukács who claims that "wir könnten sagen: die Alten sehen die Tragödie naiv. Die Tragödie ist vom Gesichtspunkt der handelnden Personen und der Stilisierung der Welt aposteriorisch. Daher ist auch das theoretische zu-Ende-Gedachtsein des Problems weniger notwendig. Die Neuen hingegen nehmen als erste die Tragödie wahr und sehen in deren Beleuchtung die einzelnen Erscheinungen des Lebens, die Menschen und Geschehnisse des Dramas; die Tragödie ist hier dem Leben gegenüber apriorisch" (1981, 102).

disenchantment"[44] (Weber) and to the fact that this disenchantment with the mythical view broke the previously monolithic reality into two distinct parts, pure transcendence, represented by the idea of God, and the distinct reality that is subject to earthly laws of physics, philosophy, economy, and others. The same process can be traced, naturally, also in art. The mythical all-encompassing structure has revealed its two sides: the religious instance (legend) as well as the secular story (plot).

I have posited above that for a comprehensive understanding of both everyday reality (life) and artistic endeavours (such as tragedy) the key concept under investigation is the most elementary, the most basic ingredient, the subject. Thus, it is my conviction that for any exegesis of human issues, it is essential to start with the analysis of the concept of subject or, better yet, with its development.

It is useful to acknowledge at the outset that the concept of subject in and of itself is not devoid of difficulty.[45] As many a scholar conveys, the subject can etymologically have, at least, a double meaning, which arose from its long and, quite frequently, discrepant usage. In fact, its exegesis can lead to two opposite attitudes. Thus, subject is a concept "das sowohl Zugrundeliegendes (hypokeímenon, subiectum) als auch Unterworfenes (subiectus = untergeben) bedeutet" (Zima 2000, 3). In the history of philosophy, one can trace both versions of the word, and sometimes, as in Hegel, they are even used conjunctively.[46] After the inception of the Cartesian idea of the subject as a bipolar concept consisting of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, the peak was reached with its idealist totality that played an important role in our contemporary comprehension of the concept. There, the concept has been elevated to the level of the absolute.[47] Thus, the newly established subject became the one and only epistemological point of departure

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44 Cf. also Cascardi 1.

45 Once again, I would like to draw attention to the commonality of the concept in contemporary philosophy as well as literary theory. Therefore, the fundamental difficulty with it is that "je öfter ein Begriff kommentiert wird, desto größer die Gefahr, daß er sich allen Definitionsversuchen endgültig entzieht" (Zima 2000, 1).

46 Critchley, for example, decided to emphasize only one meaning of the word, that which is eventually more common. He states that "subject derives form the Latin *subjectum* literally, "that which is thrown under" [...] *Subjectum* translates the Greek *hupokeimenon*, "that which lies under" "the substratum" (1996, 13).

and reevaluation. It became the hub of all past, present, and future ontological, epistemological and ethical discourses. It is clear that the usage of the subject as *hypokeímenon*, *substratum*, has been unquestionably favoured, since, as Critchley maintains, the subject has been perceived as the "matter that persists through the changes that form (*morphe*) imposes upon it" (1996, 13).[48]

Critchley further elucidates this stance by saying that "what is particular to modern metaphysics, and this means philosophy after Descartes, is that this metaphysical foundation is no longer claimed to reside in a form, substance, or deity outside of the human intellect but rather is found in the human being understood as subject" (1996, 15). Thus, metaphysics also changed its, until then firm and unquestionable situation or, better yet, it finally revealed its fundamental and immovable source. This source has always been the subject, that is "metaphysics is always metaphysics of the subject" (Critchley, ibid.) and not of some extra-subjective transcendental entities. That is why "*the subject is the subject of metaphysics*, and philosophy deals with the determination of the subject as the ultimate foundation upon which entities become intelligible. The possibility of the subject is the very possibility of philosophy" (ibid.). And, needless to say, it provides, at the same time, the very possibility of art because, in Henry's words, "man is a Subject: [...] an ob-ject whose Being is the Subject" (158).

With the Cartesian shift, it became obvious that, after all the transcendental veils had fallen off the image of the absolute, what humans found behind was a figure of the individual, of the personal subject, in fact, of themselves. Now, the problem arises as to whether this new entity has really been filled with new, that is personal and subjective content. Even though Descartes is credited with turning the previously known world-order upside down, one should advance with caution because the total subjectivization as we know it today did not materialize before Modernism. This fact makes the Cartesian

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47 What this means is that, in this philosophical strain, the idea of a steady, unchanging and permanent essence, regardless of its respective forms, has been vociferously defended as well as imposed, in retrospect, on the history of human thought.

48 It is, again, Critchley who also notes Heidegger's opinion that "during the middle ages the meaning of the words *subjectum* and *objectum* was precisely the reverse of their modern signification" [cf. Heidegger. *Wegmarken*. Frankfurt 1978, 72; "Die Zeit des Weltbildes." In: *Holzwege*. Frankfurt 1980, 86, 103-4] (13).

subject, despite its independence, still an "agent" of the former substantial ideal that is the absolute God. Only the vision of this ideal changed; its placement has been realized to be diverse, whereas it itself remained rather unaffected. This is the reading suggested by Manfred Riedel, who sees the Cartesian subject only as a logical, even historical, step in the development of the substantiality. He writes, "so haben wir Cartesisches "Ich" geschichtlich zu verstehen. In seiner Interpretation als Subjekt wirkt sich aus, daß die Subjektivität seins-geschichtlich eine Transformation der Substantialität, das letzte ontologische Derivat des Aristotelischen Seinsbegriffs, darstellt" (37). Zima's writing also bears witness to this initial problematic conception of the subject and confirms Riedel's explanation of the Cartesian concept. Zima asserts that

> die Vorstellung, Descartes habe mit seinem *cogito* die individuelle Subjektivität in der Philosophie begründet, ist zugleich richtig und falsch. Sie ist richtig, weil Descartes durch eine noch nie dagewesene Introspektion das Wahrheitskriterium, das Plato in eine objektivierte Welt der reinen Formen projizierte, im Einzelsubjekt ansiedelt. [...] Die Vorstellung is falsch, weil der Begründer des modernen Rationalismus den dem *cogito* zugrundeligenden Subjekt-Aktanten als *Beauftragten* eines göttlichen *Auftraggebers* [...] auffaßt (2000, 94-95).

Regardless of its truthfulness and accuracy, Zima's utterance was made with an ulterior motive. If, as the subsequent development of the concept has proven, Cartesian subjectivity, by having taken over all the qualities of the previous absolute, is only partially liberated, then the conditions are met for its further advancement in the direction of total subjectivization.[49]

Private quality

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[49] This position is, for example, fully supported by Williams in his claim that "in the development of liberal consciousness, the point of reference became not a general order but the individual, who as such embodied all ultimate values, including (in the ordinary emphasis of Protestantism) divine values" (68).

Among the consequences of the "world disenchantment" may be found, as the following sub-section shows, the transformation of the societal status of the dramatic character. Namely, from the public entity it changed into a primarily private one. The subject cannot be perceived as a symbol of anything larger than him/herself any more. His/her symbolic "size" as well as his/her universal communal significance shrank and the subject became "human." Thus, the question I posit here is whether such occurrences warrant a claim of the death of tragedy. The answer is, as I argue, not the destruction but a novel and unquestionably richer existence.

It was not until the link between the taxonomic and the metaphysical systems of society had been severed that this equilibrium between the subject and its totality began to change: parallel to the transference of values so too moved the characteristics of the symbol, that is of the protagonist, the hero.[50] No longer was the character to be perceived as an ancient subjective individual and, consequently, as public but, rather, it advanced to the stage of the modern subject whose main characteristic was strict ontological as well as epistemological limitation of the self.[51] It was no longer possible to perceive the dramatic character only as a symbol unless, perhaps, as the symbol of him/herself.

In the first place, the character was him/herself and only then, on that basis, could he/she be read as a representative of a larger, perhaps even communal ideal, which has been, as I have pointed out above, the case with Descartes's view that reached its apogee in Hegel's philosophy. Yet because of the subject's, and also the character's, subjective definition, any and every parallel established among the characters and the audience has,

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50 Lionel Abel is quite right when he asserts that "the problem of author versus character was I think first envisaged in *Hamlet*. From now on – unless there is to be a new culture whose values we can scarcely foresee – no dramatist has the right to set any supposedly self-conscious character on the stage who does not collaborate in his dramatization" (58). I would nonetheless suggest interpreting of his mentioning of *Hamlet* is in a rather metonymical way since it stands for the period in which the entire shift came about.

51 This has been put succinctly by Williams, namely that "the important element in the earlier emphasis on rank in tragedy was always the *general* status of the man of rank. His fate was the fate of the house or kingdom which he at once ruled and embodied" (50).

from then on, been possible only initially on the personal, private level before more extensive similarities can be realized.[52]

Whereas in antiquity the ideals individuals stood for were expected to be accepted by every member of the community, in the modern age, this uniformity of ideals, this appreciation of values and their application came to naught, becoming thus a subjective issue.[53] In other words, rules or norms are precepts only in the case of larger groups when they are supposed to be commonly observed since in the subjectively appropriated world, very little, if anything at all, can be observed as normative.[54] Consequently, an "individual norm" is not a norm *sensu stricto* but only a privately accepted regulation. Its communal reach and significance are therefore minimal.[55]

It has to be stressed again that for a substantial number of scholars this subjectivization of the tragic subject, by virtue of the previously mentioned connection between the quality of subjectivity and the dramatic protagonist, ended up nothing short of a disassembling of the entire genre of tragedy. Such would be, for example, Wilkoszewska's conviction that, as a result of this process, "the subjectivization of tragicality leads directly to its annihilation" (37),[56] with the tacit presupposed conclusion that tragicality can only be communal (that is Attic) and if this cannot be true then tragedy is as good as non-existent.

Yet during this process, as I have shown above, the subject had to take upon him/herself the characteristics previously born by external forces. These values did not disappear but were adopted, instead, by singular dramatic entities. Wilkoszewska must have then overlooked at least two cases in point. In the first place, already the tragicality of Attic tragedies and its experience have been maximally individualized. For example, in

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52 It was not until much later that Heidegger captured this meaning in a symbolically weighty clause stating that "der Mensch ist nicht der Herr des Seienden. Der Mensch ist der Hirt des Seins" (Heidegger, *Wegmarken* 338. Quoted also in Critchley 20).

53 As Williams explains it, "in modern tragedy the ends seem more wholly personal, and our interest is directed not to the "ethical vindication and necessity" but rather to "the isolated individual and his conditions"" (34).

54 Asmuth speaks out in favour of this supposition by saying that "Normen sind nämlich weitgehend Ausdruck von Gruppeninteressen. Umgekehrt beruhen manche privaten Wünsche auf verinnerlichten Normen" (144).

55 Once again, Williams is right that in the bourgeois society "the individual was neither the state nor an element of the state, but an entity in himself" (50).

Sophocles's tragedy it is only Antigone who suffers because of the non-observance of the primordial rules about the dead. Moreover, it is only Antigone who dies exclusively because she carryed out her convictions while other deaths are the consequence of either her death or the characters' own meekness. And secondly, not only did this not mean the "annihilation" of the character but, on the contrary, the modern subject had no other choice but to become much larger, a much more complex instance than the ancient individual, thus comprising in him/herself different platforms and realms that had been previously unavailable.

It seems as if Lukács had anticipated an answer for Wilkoszewska's pessimistic observation. He precisely exposed the issue of subjectivization but from a positive, constructive perspective. When talking about modern tragedy, he claims that the "tragedy gives a firm and sure answer to the most delicate question of Platonism: the question as to whether individual things can have idea or essence. In response, tragedy put the question the other way round: only that, which is individual, only something whose individuality is carried to the uttermost limit, is adequate to this idea – i.e. is really existent" (1974, 162). Without any doubt, the "utmost individuality" can be little else but the full-fledged modern dramatic subject. It is only with the full internalization of values and the conscious rational decision to observe them that the subject becomes really independent or, better still, self-dependent.

Along with the change in the essential understanding of the dramatic character and parallel to the collapse of the Attic tragedy where catharsis was assigned a role of communal, directed reaction and gregarious discharge of emotions, did the transformation in the reaction of the audience take place. As we have seen, the tragic experience did not change, only its aesthetic understanding did. Subjective reception rests on numerous possibilities of perception, all of which are possible. While in antiquity, most likely, this could not have been even imagined, now, according to Lukács, "im neuen Drama der Charakter viel wichtiger ist als im alten und zugleich auch viel weniger wichtig. Es ist nur mehr Sache des Standpunktes, ob wir seine formale Bedeutung über

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[56] In this stance Wilkoszewska follows George Steiner.

alles stellen oder ganz auf Null setzen" (1981, 98). Hence, the issue of reception is not that of truth but that of personal legitimacy.

3.3 German Idealism

The following section presents the influence and importance of German Idealism for the understanding of tragedy. It is important to introduce the key components of its idea of tragedy. Such is the idealist perception of the subject as an absolute epistemological entity. In the theory's penchant for the absolute systematic, subject became the meeting point of the reality and art, life and tragedy. With the downfall of this philosophical approach, tragedy lost its staunchest supporter and backing. The main criticism reached the idealist theory of tragedy with the argument countering its self-reticence and exclusion of, as well as from, the reality.

The new concept of subjectivity whose formation started with the surge of Christianity and further received its aesthetic foundations with Renaissance art and its philosophical ones with Descartes was about to begin a lengthy but, in the end, victorious process of establishing itself. Through this path subjectivity has reached a number of important turning points, of which among them the most significant was the philosophy of German Idealism.

The seeming emphasis on the individual subject notwithstanding, its quality has to be nonetheless acknowledged. Although still a subject, this entity was not viewed as depending on the world or, at the most, as its equal. Contrarily, it was thought of as its master.[57] This was Hegel's key question within his Arcadian holistic system. As Zima describes this most fittingly, in German Idealism "es geht darum, von der Erfahrung der Einzelsubjekte zu abstrahieren, um sie einem allgemeinen Prinzip unterwerfen zu können" (2000, 102). German Idealism was probably the last instance in the course of the history of philosophy where an attempt had been made to turn the concept of subject into

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[57] Cf. Hegel's "master and servant" aporia from his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*.

an absolute cognitive instance.[58] However, this position had only one significant flaw: for its correct functioning it required a particular presupposition, namely, that the quality of the subjectivity must be acknowledged within the system. This shortcoming was bridged by another dogmatic requirement that the system comprised the entire known reality that culminated in turning these concepts into absolutes.

In the totalizing system of idealist aesthetics, art was a particularly important component of the equation.[59] It was perceived as a human endeavour to reach the eternal, absolute divine values or, in other words, the substantial, metaphysical oneness. Such was, for example, Hegel's identity of oppositions. This is obvious in his assertion that "der Zweck aller Kunst ist die durch den Geist hervorgebrachte Identität, in welcher das Ewige, Göttliche, an und für sich Wahre in realer Erscheinung und Gestalt für unsere äußere Anschauung für Gemüt und Vorstellung geoffenbart wird" (II: 585). Yet as subsequent critically oriented philosophers have shown, the subject may be absolutely individual only in theory and not practically, that is, in reality. In order to become the subject within the system it has to change from an individual real subject into a theoretical subjectivity, one that would fit the mould. Hegel, as the last "high priest" of subjectivity, established the subject as the absolute category, which was the point at which the idealistic philosophy stood and later fell.[60]

In this sense Hegel actually goes even further than Aristotle in perceiving the character as an *à priori* quality, the one who triggers the action and, most importantly, steers it in a desired direction. If, in Aristotle's time the hero was an inextricable part of the world, even the "universe," with his/her actions depending on external conditions, then in the modern era, where heroes are separate from the world, he/she does not depend on it but, rather, acts as its counterpart. In a stance very similar to the famous

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58 The finality of these systemic attempts has been seen by Asmuth, too, who claims that "seit dem 18. Jh. ist das alte Ordnungssystem fragwürdig," as well as since then the "pluralistische Tendenzen" (94) can be increasingly detected in scholarly debates.

59 Kant devoted the first half of his third Critique (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 1791) to art, a seminal strain of Schelling's philosophy was aesthetic (*Philosophie der Kunst*, 1802-03), whereas in Hegel's system art resided at the peak of his axiological scale among the three embodiments of the absolute spirit; especially in his Berlin *Lectures on Aesthetics* (appeared posthumously in 1835).

60 Two names should be mentioned here in terms of an important revision of the idealistic Hegelian view, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who will be discussed later on page 152 *et passim*, and Jean Paul.

> "world-views." So far Western history had known two such crises. The first was when the antique world shifted from simplicity to reflection, from belief in gods to belief in fate. The second was when the medieval order was shaken by the individualism of the Protestants (1960, 28-29).

Quite conveniently, this stance brushes aside some possibly awkward but relevant questions, such as the relation of the Medieval epoch to the new subjectivity. Yet this oversight, intentional or not, did not go unnoticed. In spite of the predominance of this theory, a very insightful explanation has been provided by Michel Foucault. He claims that "classical antiquity had not problematized the constitution of the self as subject: On the other hand, beginning with Christianity morality was confiscated by the theory of the subject."[31] This is why Ferry and Renaut may draw the conclusion that "*the birth of the subject* [...] coincides with the diffusion of Christianity" (ibid.).

With the advent of Christianity, that is, as soon as ancient transcendence was overcome, the process of a subject's becoming fully aware of him/herself was unleashed. It is not possible to stress enough the magnitude and the importance of the development of the subject that emerged like Botticelli's Venus from the sea. Time and again, the additional metaphysical covers were peeled back in order to reveal the new, that is, the Christian basis for all human endeavours and, most significantly, for our own comprehension of ourselves. Nonetheless, at this point in time, the concept of subject still had a long way to go before it would reach its Renaissance "liberation."

Through this shift, which from our present-day perspective was only a partial one, the individual discovered him/herself in a new guise of a subject or God's most prominent creation and thus in charge of his/her own existence as well as of the surrounding world. Along with it, the ancient cyclical conception of time was broken and extended into a linear conception of time. Each event in our lives became a unique episode in a unique time and space. Nietzsche is well on the mark when he writes that the

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[31] Foucault's interview in *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, May 29, 1984. Quoted in Ferry, Renaut 113.

"character is no longer meant to be capable of being expanded into an eternal type [...] Here too we may observe the victory of the phenomenal over the universal" (1999, 83).[32]

Human beings ceased to originate essentially from an external entity, such as gods, that once used to enable them to live and act. Because "the history of modern metaphysics is the history of the progressive subjectification of Being,"[33] we have realized just how absolutely isolated our existence is. The drive for an essential and existential autonomy was so powerful that even the period in which the modern world tried its best to once again aesthetically relive Greek antiquity in its full splendor, that is French Classicism, witnessed the famous opposition to the ancient model of tragedy during "La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes," as well as later in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* in which Marmontel rebelliously, as Dukore sees it, "drew a distinction between ancient characters, the causes of whose tragedies lay outside them, and modern characters, whose tragedies arose inwardly from quality of soul without reference to "*the station, name, birth of the unfortunate person*"" (290-92). This stance shows that as soon as we had become aware of ourselves as the center and as also the reason for our existence, there was no option for tragedy to be located anywhere else but on the "inside.'[34]

From the disintegration of the ancient society and on into the centuries that followed, the process of the formation of modern subjectivity continued. It could never return to its ancient state, not only for the obvious reasons of a newly established social, political, religious and economic order, but also because of the basic change in its own conception. In this shift, the subject was endowed with a hitherto unknown consciousness, that of a creator.[35] Put differently, what the individual had been in antiquity only in contingency, the modern subject then became in reality. The parallel

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32 He emphasized this as the recurring problem: particularization and, therefore, disintegration of a fully inclusive transcendental picture of the world and, consequently, the dramatic genre of tragedy.

33 Critchley 1996, 24.

34 Max Horkheimer confirms this from a sociological point of view. Not only did this shift have implications on the existential level but it immediately spread, as their origin, to all the others, namely "die Zelle der Gesellschaft ist nicht mehr die Familie, sondern das soziale Atom, das Individuum allein" (59).

35 Interestingly enough, some historical avantgardes in Modernism, such as Decadence and Expressionism experimented with this idea much later and attempted to bring it to fruition.

Schopenhauerian concept of will, Hegel understands the dramatic action as based on an independent decision that does not veer off from the absolute ideals. This means that, for him, subjectivity is only that, which fully agrees with ideals and fits into the system, where it acts independently on its own. Thus, the subject's activity relies on or, better yet, is "das ausgeführte Wollen das zugleich ein *gewußtes* ist, sowohl in betreff auf seinen Ursprung [...] als auch in Rücksicht auf sein Endresultat. Was nämlich aus der Tat herauskommt, geht für das Individuum selber daraus hervor und übt seinen Rückschlag auf den subjektiven Charakter und dessen Zustände aus" (II: 515-16). Action can only assert itself as a means to achieve a preset goal because, as Plumpe warns, not every action is intentional, since "die Transformation eines Zustandes A in einen Zustand B für sich genommen [ist] noch keine eigentliche Handlung" (I: 346).

Only in a play, preferably a tragedy, is it possible for the true individual to be an uncovered individual because "das eigentlich *Dramatische* endlich ist das Aussprechen der Individuen in dem Kampf ihrer Interessen und dem Zwiespalt ihrer Charaktere und Leidenschaften" (Hegel II: 525). One can see how far dramatic theory has developed since Aristotle. No longer is the crisis of the character seen in his/her opposing the absolute but, rather, in his/her individual course of life. Modern-era particularity of the subject took over his/her ancient uniformity. Thus Hegel asserts the humaneness and reality of modern characters as opposed to the ancient ones. The real contrast between ancient and modern dramatic heroes is "der Gegensatz [...] einer *abstrakten* und dadurch formellen Charakteristik Individuen gegenüber, die uns als konkrete Menschen lebendig entgegentreten" (II: 576).[61] Through this acknowledgement Hegel shows awareness with regard to expressions of singular personality, that is, to the living human being and not the embodied ideal. Nevertheless, if one rejoiced at his full recognition of modern characters, one would be celebrating too early. Namely, to be "concrete" and "alive" for Hegel means neither to belong to the system, nor to be its integral part. Characters in

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61 Furthermore, he recognizes that "die romantischen Charaktere hingegen stehen von Anfang an mitten in einer Breite zufälligerer Verhältnisse und Bedingungen, innerhalb welcher sich so und anders handeln ließe, so daß der Konflikt, zu welchem die äußeren Voraussetzungen allerdings den Anlaß darbieten, wesentlich in dem *Charakter* liegt, dem die Individuen in ihrer Leidenschaft nicht um der substantiellen Berechtigung willen, sonder weil sie einmal das sind, was sie sind, Folge leisten" (II: 576).

modern dramas do meet their tragic ends and these ends reveal some higher meaning of the conflict that, in turn, asserts their positioning within the whole. Similar to the situation in ancient dramas, Hegel needs the tragic death of a character only to assert his grand scheme of the world. Such an end is, in a way, a fulfillment of eternal justice or the re-uniting of the previously torn substantiality, an occurrence with references to the communal value-system because, although subjective, it is not whimsical. Or, better yet, precisely because of having been endowed with the qualities of a subject, the character conforms to the system.

The purpose of an element in a system means that it is connected with and relates to other elements, and moreover, that it cannot stand on its own, which would defy, obviously, the purpose of the system. If particularized, Hegel claims, then they are not an element of the system, because "wird einmal alles in die bloß moralische Gesinnung und in das Herz hineingespielt, so hat in dieser Subjektiviät und Stärke der moralischen Reflexion die sonstige Bestimmtheit des Charakters oder wenigstens der besonderen Zwecke keinen Halt mehr" (II: 582).

Subjective awareness

This sub-section explains one of the essential idealist parameters of the tragic subject, namely self-consciousness. If, for Hegel, the consequence of the ultimate self-awareness leads to the tragic conflict, then later, with the criticism of Idealism, the indispensable link between the existence and the conflict breaks down. The character's symbolic nature can no longer be sustained and the idealist totality of form and content is overthrown. Nevertheless, as I show, the essential universal characteristic of the tragic protagonist is saved through a twist in understanding, very lucidly demonstrated by Sartre.

Hegel appears to be thus caught between the Scylla of full recognition of individual subjectivity and the Charybdis of a systemic generalization. It is obvious that the advantage given to any one of the two would stifle the other: full subjectivity would destroy the system, while full subordination to the system would suffocate the subject. However, Hegel was able to find a third option that satisfied both sides. The rescue was

thus entrusted to the level of subjective awareness. Namely, the more developed the awareness, the closer to the substantial values the character would be, and the fewer problems would occur with the subject's involvement in the system. They are concluded entities, total in their own perception, since "bei der Subjektivität der Charaktere tritt nun hierbei sogleich die Forderung ein, daß sich auch die Individuen in sich selbst mit ihrem individuellen Schicksal versöhnt zeigen müßten" (Hegel II: 580). This reconciliation reveals sharing of the eternal rules and being part of the overall justice realm that can be reached solely as a consequence of total awareness. This characteristic of Hegel's approach was noticed, too, by Zima who claims that "für das individuelle Subjekt Hegels ist es folglich entscheidend, den Grad an Selbstbewußtsein zu erreichen, der es ihm gestattet, sich mit dem Weltgeist und der Weltgeschichte identisch zu wähnen" (2000, 109). "Self-consciousness" is so the feature that subjects have to develop in order to reach the farthest end and, at least in their perspective, become identical with substantiality. Yet this attribute is exactly the one constituting a subject in the first place, implying that, for Hegel, there are states with lesser and, consequently, higher degree of self-awareness. Does this mean that there are different subjects depending on their state of alertness? Do they all then deserve the name of subject?

Hegel himself took a clear stance towards this issue. He assigned the tragic conflicts the highest degree of self-awareness. In tragedies the characters that have entered into a tragic conflict have done so on the basis of their heightened consciousness and on their internally developed and acquired value system – one that has no other choice but to necessarily correspond with that of substantiality. Therefore, "die Tragik der Konflikte und Lösung muß überhaupt nur da geltend gemacht werden, wo dies, um einer höheren Anschauung ihr Recht zu geben, notwendig ist. Wenn aber diese Notwendigkeit fehlt, so ist das bloße Leiden und Unglück durch nichts gerechtfertigt" (II: 592).

As many interpreters of Hegel's theory such as Lukács, Szondi, and also Williams, observed, for Hegel tragedy rests neither in the substantiality nor in the intricacies of heroes' characters but solely in their "meeting point," that is in their conflict. This is precisely because through the conflict both sides may be, as Hegel maintains, seen in their most purified form. Viewed in terms of both concepts, the

conflict seems to be their pinnacle, for, according to Williams, "in tragedy [...] both the individual aims and the consequent conflict are substantive and essential" (33) and fit into the whole.

In this way, the conditions for the tragic conflict are met already with the development of a full-fledged subjectivity because "das Drama muß die Situationen und deren Stimmung bestimmt zeigen durch den individuellen Charakter, der sich zu besonderen Zwecken entschließt" (Hegel II: 515). Conflicts are, in fact, nothing less than the consequences of actions.[62] It is obvious, then, that the actions themselves cannot differ from their own consequences. Action is precisely the form in which the content of the hero's character is embodied or, in Hegel's words, "tritt die Handlung als *Handlung* auf, als wirkliches Ausführen innerer Absichten und Zwecke, mit deren Realität sich das Subjekt als mit sich selbst zusammenschließt und darin sich selber will und genießt" (II: 516). This "inner purpose" is the same contingency that exists in Aristotelian thought. Therefore, the passing from a mere contingency into reality happens through only one medium: action. It is also through action that the subject becomes fully self-aware. Hegel avers that "die Handlung ist die klarste Enthüllung des Individuums [...] was der Mensch im innersten Grunde ist, bringt sich erst durch sein Handeln zur Wirklichkeit" (I: 216).[63] When realizing itself, the character cannot be other than what it is, or better yet, when opening itself to reality, the character maximally invests him/herself, discloses him/herself in his/her totality and, hence, becomes intertwined with substantiality.[64] In this sense, any action, insofar as it is a truly voluntary pursuit, is the coming-into-being of

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62 Roughly at the same time, Schopenhauer was writing that "the revelation of the Idea of mankind is attained especially by two means, namely by true and profound presentation of significant characters, and by the invention of pregnant situations in which they disclose themselves" (251).

63 Also, in his *Rechtsphilosophie* Hegel states that "die Äußerung des Willens als subjektiven [...] ist Handlung" (VII: 211. Quoted in Plumpe I: 346).

64 Partial disclosure may be possible, in my opinion, only when the action is not yet complete, rather than in the case of the underdevelopment of character. For example, even if the hero does not undertake an action or, as in Hebbel's theory, perceives passive reception already as tragic action, it still is the full embodiment of the hero's character. Even though Plumpe maintains that "das ironische Individuum handelt im Extremfall überhaupt nicht mehr, da kein Handlungsziel es wirklich befeuren kann" (I: 347), this does not mean the "thinning out" of the character. There may be nothing which is not previously, as a contingency of course, "housed" in the protagonist. This stance of mine is no fatalistic vision of the human's dependence on the prescribed destiny. Rather, allowing for free will, it is an expression of a view that any action of the subject has to be, in one way or another, consistent with the subject's character.

the character because "das dramatische Individuum muß [...] an ihm selber durch und durch lebendig, eine fertige Totalität sein, deren Gesinnung und Charakter mit ihrem Zweck und Handeln übereinstimmt" (Hegel II: 531-32). In other words, the true subject for Hegel simply cannot veer off from its substantial path. A character becomes the subject exactly at the point in time when he/she realizes this fundamental truth.

Clearly, in my reading of Hegel there is no doubt about the essential interconnectedness of the two concepts, since only together can they construct the full subject. The purely sophist pursuit of the primacy of either one seems to correspond to the famous enigma about the chicken and the egg. But, as it has become obvious, such an extremist position is utterly unnecessary. Since one concept needs the other for its own functioning, it is clear that there is no preeminence between the two. Szondi, for example, while discussing Hegel's foremost ideal in art, quotes the philosopher's words from his *Wissenschaft der Logik*: "wahrhafte Kunstwerke sind eben nur solche, deren Inhalt und Form sich als durchaus identisch erweisen" (1969, 10). Being aware of the importance that the ideal works of art occupied in Hegel's system, it can be said with full confidence that it is quite evident that the hero's character and his/her action may be perceived in this light as well.

Since this is a tautological equation, it is possible, along with Hegel, to posit that "ein wahrhaftes Ende wird deshalb nur dann erzielt, wenn der Zweck und das Interesse der Handlung, um welche das Ganze sich dreht, identisch mit den Individuen und schlechthin an sie gebunden ist" (II: 521). A strikingly similar conviction can be traced in England in S. T. Coleridge's theory of theatre. Under the influence of German Romantics, particularly Schlegel brothers, Coleridge rejected the three unities and introduced "more appropriate, though scholastic and uncouth, words homogeneity, proportionateness, and totality of interest" (110). Translated into Hegelian "language," this would mean the absolute, necessarily proportionate identity of form and content. This passage also cannot hide its closeness to Goethe's theory of "life," especially since Coleridge sought for "the creative, productive, life-power of inspired genius" (ibid.), echoing thus a typically romantic position on divine involvement in art. Coleridge's views were rejected as mere speculations by more pragmatically oriented theorists of theatre, especially William Hazlitt.

Thus, the age-old dilemma about the primacy of either character or the action, internal or external reality, should be laid to rest. Although it is true that Hegel made strides in the understanding and analysis of the subject as an independent dramatic character, it is also clear that he did not go far enough. Despite his support for the modern autonomous subjectivity and, consequently, the modern form of tragedy, his vision of the tragic subject remained rooted within his supreme design. Dramatic characters were given to a certain extent the right to their own personal feelings and idiosyncratic responses of their fallible hearts, yet they were allowed this only insofar as they would fit the grand scheme of the system. They were caught in a snare of systemic uniformity that, in fact, took away their real autonomy.

The subject should exist regardless of the surrounding circumstances. The idea of being a subject is being one without any conditions. There may be no gradation in, or degree of self-awareness, or any other quality for that matter. Subjectivity is a complete entity, complete in itself. The avalanche of criticism that broke out after Hegel's death should, therefore, come as no surprise.[65] Half a century after his death, the ground was laid for a totally different cognitive paradigm, another shift in the development of society, where concepts were once again radically reconceptualized.

Numerous theorists criticized Hegel's absoluteness and his exclusion of the lived reality together with its ingredients. The main reason for the critique was idealist rigidity because no matter how large the system might have been, it could never totally correspond to life.[66] Any regulatory principle imposed on the plurality of reality, of which the world has been increasingly aware, was therefore seen as its constraint, too. This was especially obvious in the case of the subject. This philosophical concept, as

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65 Not everybody discarded Hegel's ideas completely. A new philosophical current of neo-Hegelianism was created by such philosophical minds as F. Th. Vischer, B. Croce, A. Kojève, G. Lukács et al. Although they, in general, had to admit the incapacity of the system to comprise every and all varieties of life, Vischer's position still was that "den wahren Begriff des tragischen Schicksals bilden [...] zwei Momente: das Absolute und das Subjekt" (quoted in Szondi 1964, 35).

66 Interestingly enough, this idea has been reused in postmodernism by Jean Baudrillard in his notion of simulacrum (cf. his *Simulations*). Being a pure construct, the simulacrum, similarly to a geographical map, extends over the entire charted physical territory. In this way the signifier becomes more perfect than the signified. Yet in Baudrillard's postmodern view, the relation between the two entities is one of sheer play. Absolutely no "higher" meaning should be attributed to their fluid dialectical interrelatedness.

many a theorist claimed, was denied a direct connection with reality, which resulted in the concept's inadequacy.

Particularly poignant, in this sense, has been Sartre's critique. Although biased due to his existentialist perspective, he nonetheless expressed a broadly accepted critique of Hegel. Namely, by proving the anchoring of the universal in the particular, Sartre reflected on the fundamental non-sustainability of Hegel's position and revealed the subject's necessary connectedness with the factual reality. He avers, "loin que l'attitude particulière soit, comme chez Hegel, une incarnation dialectique du moment universel, l'ancrage de la personne fait de cet universel une singularité irréductible" (1966, 44). Furthermore, "l'homme, irrémediable singularité, est l'être par qui l'universel vient au monde et le hasard constitutif, dès qu'il est vécu, prend figure de nécessité" (1966, 46). It is true that the contingent, i.e. existing only in theory, human being may be understood as the carrier of the absolute. Yet as soon he/she becomes an actual person, this ideal takes the shape of actual reality. Any absolutization encloses itself as well as its object in an illusory "world" or, with his words, "si l'objectivité doit être savoir inconditionné, il n'y a pas d'objectivité réelle" (1966, 41-42).

Max Stirner was also intensely critical with regard to Hegel's abstract philosophy claiming that "das "absolute Denken" ist dasjenige Denken, welches vergißt, daß es mein Denken ist, daß Ich denke und daß es nur durch Mich ist" (381-82). This quote reveals the direction in which the development of the concept was heading: a deeply real and concrete subjectivity. Furthermore, as Sartre remarked, the universality Hegel had worked so hard to introduce could not turn once it was to be employed and used, into its dialectical embodiment but, by necessity, had to become reductionist. That, in turn, would develop into a full-fledged contingency. Or, put very bluntly, the universalist abstract system can work only in theory. With Sartre's words, "la nécessité hégelienne n'est pas niée, mais elle ne peut s'incarner sans devenir contingence opaque et singulière; en un individu la raison de l'histoire est irréductiblement vécue comme folie, comme hasard intérieur, exprimant des rencontres de hasard" (1966, 45-46).

The notion of "hasard" in the wake of Hegelian philosophy has been steadfastly propelled by his staunchest foe, Nietzsche. Not only did Nietzsche, as we have seen above, perceive his own time as the most destructive for tragedy, but he rejected any kind

of firm subjectivity whatsoever. Nietzsche influenced many of his successors with an adamantly iconoclastic approach so pertinently subsumed by Fuchs, namely "Hegel's linkage of the Absolute with subjectivity results in a quasi-sacralization of dramatic character (which partakes of the absolutes of art and of subjectivity). But Nietzsche breaks the Hegelian connection between character and the Absolute. Individual subjectivity now becomes not a gateway but a barrier to deep connection with universal psychic forces" (27). But this exactly is, in Nietzsche's view, truly tragic. No wonder, then, that it was his particular attitude that was accepted with open arms in our contemporary period of Postmodernism, the period in which absolute values are considered obsolete.

Nonetheless, there is an imminent danger in fully accepting Nietzsche's contemptuous vision. Even though he is right in disapproving of Hegel's totalizing philosophical design, his stance is no less absolute. This can be seen especially in the successors' reading of his work. As Fuchs maintains, "Nietzsche goes beyond positivistic theories of artistic change from period to period to suggest that artistic differences can be understood fundamentally as differences in the nature of human subjectivity, of its understanding to itself of itself" (29). Here lies the crux of Nietzsche's fallibility: namely, such a perspective on subjectivity is far from being open and contingent, it is itself absolute. Nietzsche does reject idealistic as well as empirical theoretical stances. Yet his claim that the one trans-temporal foundation for any and all aesthetic, ontological, epistemological changes in the world is, quite simply, human subjectivity falls nothing short of another absolutization.

Friedrich Hebbel

The first post-Hegelian theorist and practitioner of tragedy who drew attention to the universalism of a singular experience was Hebbel. As I have already posited, the tragic experience was always individual in both its experience as well as its perception. This sub-section tackles the source as well as the consequences of this issue.

Soon after Hegel's death, theoreticians as well as playwrights realized that in order to give dramatic subjects back their tragic "lives," that is roles, which would

correspond to life and reality, a more permissive path was needed. The right note had to be struck with regard to maintaining equilibrium of the subject in drama, to taking a middle path between his/her subjective freedom and external dependence, between his/her concrete contemporaneity and "eternal" characteristics.[67] In light of this realization, Hebbel suggested a courageous new image of tragedy; "das Drama ist nur dann *möglich*, wenn in diesem Zustand eine entscheidende *Veränderung* vor sich geht, es ist daher durchaus ein Produkt der Zeit, aber freilich nur in dem Sinne, worin eine solche Zeit selbst ein Produkt aller vorhergegangenen Zeiten ist" (3-4). What strikes the reader about this statement as particularly important is the apparent connection between the past (which can be interpreted as the eternal realm of objective ideals), and the present (standing for the axiological volatility of a concrete subjectivity). The latter is now given much more emphasis than before. It is not enclosed in a hermetic system but, rather, opened up to every-day life. Hebbel maintains that modern reality may be and, of course, is as tragic as the ancient one. For this realization only one small shift in the concept has to be made: to acknowledge the importance of the contingency of the present for our lives and, consequently, for the lives of the dramatic heroes. As Szondi writes, "wie Schopenhauer und später Nietzsche erachtet in Hegels Nachfolge auch Hebbel das Individuationsprinzip als den eigentlichen Grund des Tragischen" (1964, 43).[68] The momentous transformation consists in the positioning of the subject: neither in the abstract totality nor in the absolute past.[69]

The essence of Hebbel's novelty appears to be his bringing to the fore of the tragic as a necessarily situated in the present. The tragic cannot be something relating to the past, something that we, even from our contemporary point of view, should be looking for in antiquity. Quite on the contrary, the tragic can, does and also has to occur

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67 Williams sees these "eternal characteristics" as the "Idea." Speaking of Hebbel, he writes that "for him tragedy is the conflict between the individual, in his most general human capacity, and the "Idea" which through social and religious institutions both shapes and limits him" (36).

68 Szondi quotes Hebbel's diaries which reveal his efforts to bring a contemporary reality in line with the genre of ancient tragedy. Hebbel writes that "das Leben ist eine furchtbare Notwendigkeit, die auf Treu und Glauben angenommen werden muß, die aber keiner begreift." Since today there are no agents embodying the ancient forces in control of both physical and metaphysical worlds, then "das moderne Schicksal ist die Silhouette Gottes, des Unbegreiflichen und Unerfaßbaren" (1964, 43).

today. Therefore, Hebbel believes, we should cut the umbilical cord binding us with the traditional (that is Aristotelian) understanding of the tragic and translate it into our contemporary language, "denn der Mensch dieses Jahrhunderts will nicht, wie man ihm Schuld gibt, neue und unerhörte Institutionen, er will nur ein besseres Fundament für die schon vorhandenen, er will, daß sie sich auf nichts als auf Sittlichkeit und Notwendigkeit, die identisch sind, stützen und also den äußeren Haken, an dem sie bis jetzt zum Teil befestigt waren gegen den inneren Schwerpunkt, aus dem sie sich vollständig ableiten lassen, vertauschen sollen" (7). In Hebbel's opinion, for one's present-day appreciation of the tragic one does not need immediate references to the past because they, necessarily, are hidden yet already present in one's contemporary understanding of the world: every subsequent period evolves from the previous ones or, put differently, the past always resonates in the present. The problem then lies solely in becoming aware and admitting it. Thus the individuation Hebbel suggested happened, contrarily to the abstract thinking, not at the expense of the subject's freedom but in ending his/her dependence. It is guaranteed through the dramatic characters' association with the past (once again, embodying the eternal values), exclusively through their own present time, which does not automatically mean the negation of the absolute trans-temporal values.[70]

Not surprisingly, Hebbel's stance has come to be understood as a complete misunderstanding. Bentley, for example, goes to great lengths to prove that "he gave drama a backbone of dialectic – according to the Hegelian formula, some will say, though Hebbel made of the dialectic of history a tragic, not a merely logical or merliorist, development. This is an admirable misunderstanding of Hegel and the cornerstone of Hebbelism. [...] For him the antithesis which confronted the thesis was a Divine Antagonist, a social manifestation of the Idea which became a new sort of fate" (1960,

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69 Lukács, in Hebbel's footsteps, insists that "der Individualismus jedoch als Lebensproblem ist dennoch das Produkt des Zeitalters" (1981, 93).

70 Much later, at the height of postmodernism, Fuchs refers to complete relativization of the subject by relating to Foucault's "most startling archeologic assertion: that the modern, humanistic notion of Man is itself culturally limited, a passing historical phenomenon" (29).

52). What Bentley, unfortunately, fails to realize and reads as a miscomprehension of Hegel has been, in Hebbel's case, an accurate critique.[71]

This exactly is the way in which Hebbel wanted to proceed and disclose our human dependence on empirical facts contextualized in every day reality as opposed to the self-enclosed system. The succeeding artistic currents of Modernism developed, needless to say, precisely in this direction. Among other voices one can mention that of Albert Camus who may be perceived to be Hebbel's direct descendent. In this vein, it is safe to say that Hebbel's argument about the individuality of the tragic experience is as valid as ever.

Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard

It is my intention to show in the following sub-section, the criticism of German Idealism and Hegel in particular was fierce. Most instrumental in delivering a final *coup de grace* were three strongest philosophers of utter individualism, freedom, and spontaneity. Schopenhauer with his concept of a blind fiery force called will discarded rationality; Nietzsche with his idea of how the will to power belittled structural compassion as the fundament of a community, and Kierkegaard with his chief concern, that of the singular experience of an individual in a mostly hostile environment.

The entire horizon of subjectivity's dissociation firstly from the external point of reference (such as the critique of Hegel) and secondly within itself may become clearer after a look at the main philosophical figures who were instrumental at the outset of this process. Again, I should underscore, dramatic art did not lag behind philosophy. One should be aware that "at the entrance to theatrical Modernism, there are clear signs that autonomous character is in retreat from its Hegelian apogee" (Fuchs 31).

It has been well evidenced that three names should be linked with the attack on the already shaky structure of idealist philosophy, namely those of Schopenhauer,

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[71] He had published his introduction to *Maria Magdalena* in which he explained his theoretical views on tragedy as early as 1844.

Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard.[72] If one should identify a recurring thought binding their views, one might say with Oehm that the gist of their "rebellion" is "der Abbau aller Bewußtseinsinhalte, moralischen Imperative und Vernunftprinzipien des unter totalen Ideologieverdacht geratenen bürgerlich-liberalen Individuums [...] als prinzipiell unabschließbarer Prozeß der historischen Entdifferenzierung und ekstatischen Entgrenzung von Subjektivität" (10).

Through the concept of will Schopenhauer enthroned a blind, driving, insatiable force that stirred the passionate, fervent, extreme powers in human beings. The will he presented has been foremostly directed against the notion of the rationally established and neatly maintained abstract order.[73] Our being, in Taylor's view, is an integral part and in fundamental accord with nature, the "amoral force" (445), our own "expressive powers" (446) as well as the quality, which Taylor calls our "link with the whole of nature, but as a great reservoir of unbridled power, which underlies our mental life" (ibid.) have all had an immense influence. The key issue of his views with regard to tragedy is the discovery of the "dark side" of nature, that which had been previously cautiously described by Kant as the sublime one, only with the difference that now it cannot be observed from a safe "distance" but, rather, it should be the source of human immediate experience. Moreover, this "storm of earthly powers" has been unveiled within ourselves too. In Lukács's words, "hier ist das äußere Geschehen ganz innerlich geworden" (1981, 101). It is thus Schopenhauer's stance that tragedy "presents to us in terrible magnitude and distinctness at the highest grade of the will's objectification that very conflict of the will with itself" (255). This has been one of the very first voices claiming that subjectivity is an enclosed entity in itself, reminding us thus of Leibnitz's monad, and that it corresponds to the entire world. In other words, the conflictual plane is not one between the subject and the external world any more but the one discovered within the subjectivity. Consequently, modern dramatic heroes are aware of these unexplicably powerful emotional forces, imperative feelings, commanding and dominant voices in themselves. They are aware of

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[72] Cf. among others Oehm 10 *et passim* as well as Williams 1966, 37, Taylor 441-456, Zima 2000, 118-161.

being, paradoxically, a part of the world as well as, conversely, the latter being a part of them. It is this authoritative notion that, in Schopenhauer's view, elevates modern heroes above the ancient ones, something, which has been also noticed by Lukács who writes, "daher empfängt Schopenhauer, der diese Stimmung, die Resignation, wie er sie nennt, für das Wesentliche der Tragödie ansieht, die moderne Tragödie höherwertig, als die alte" (1981, 101).

Very similar to Schopenhauer with regard to declaring that existence is tragic in itself was Nietzsche. In his philosophy, rationality underwent the strongest and the most devastating attacks of derision. Against rationality he enthroned the concept of the "ecstatic," which is another version of the Schopenhauerian wild uncontrollable nature.[74] His pure will to exist, the drive that pushes human beings to break the barrier between the sublime and ourselves and to become entangled in the midst of a whirlwind of existence was in Nietzsche's thought changed into a particularly directed will to power. The only carrier worthy of possessing and accomplishing it was to become his *Übermensch* since normal people have, in general, lost this drive because of the rational necessarily optimistic perspective of the world. Modern man thus "no longer wants anything in its entirety, complete with all the natural cruelty of things; this is how enfeebled and softened he has become by the optimistic way of looking at things" (Nietzsche 1999, 88).[75] The modern people are not only optimistic but also self-centered. Instead of their partaking in the communal spirit, instead of realizing a vocation in their lives, instead of their active involvement with the society for better or for worse, "die meisten Menschen sind offenbar zufällig auf der Welt: es zeigt sich keine Notwendigkeit höherer Art in ihnen."[76] They are only "contemporary" people who choose their personal satisfaction

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73 Interestingly, one of Schopenhauer's descriptions of the will says that "the form of the phenomenon of the will, and hence the form of life or of reality, is really only the present, not the future or the past" (278). It is, then, safe to say that the present character reveals his/her dramatic dimension in tragedy.

74 Szondi, too, aruges that "als Ahnen der beiden Nietzscheschen Kunstprinzipien "dionysisch" und "apollinisch" dürfen wohl Schopenhauers Begriffe "Wille" und "Vorstellung" angesehen werden" (1964, 46).

75 One should not confuse Nietzsche's disrespectful attitude towards the masses with his almost idealistic perspective of the one and only chosen subject in whose case he underlines his/her powerful subjectivity.

76 Nietzsche. "Wir Philologen." In: Nietzsche. *Werke*. Vol. 5, 327. Quoted in Zima 2000, 138.

over the idealistic issues of the society.[77] Ancient tragedy has been, in Nietzsche's view, the only one in which the collective character was publicly visible and also experienced by the audience. Only in the past did the dramatic characters want to put the fate of their nation or state ahead of their own fate. Thus, "what is generally overlooked is that the ancient national energy and national passion that became gloriously visible in war and warlike games have now been transmuted into countless private passions" (Nietzsche 1974, 96).

Nonetheless, it has to be said that although critiquing Hegel's views, Nietzsche still understands the hero as an ancient individual. Moreover, for him there is no need to question the qualities of a character, because the "real characters" are, as we have seen above, "a fine deception and exaggeration" since there may be only one form of man [*Mensch*], the essential one [*Übermensch*]. Thus, "a genuine man is something absolutely *necessary* (even in those so called contradictions), but we do not recognize this necessity" (1996, 85). It is hard to imagine a more subjectivist and, for that matter, self-limiting view. Nietzsche's theory can be traced to the all-inclusiveness of the antiquity, yet it is regarded not from the point of view of society in general but strictly that of an individual who has become a subject. Once again, in Nietzsche's extreme conception, "die tragische Dialektik hat zum Schauplatz den Menschen selber" (Szondi 1964, 31).

Another seminal boost in the disassembling of the idealist subjectivity embodied the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. The philosopher was particularly instrumental in the reevaluation and strengthening of the modern subjectivity or "den Einzelnen." His importance was to retrieve the value of the individual human being that was later regarded with contempt by Nietzsche that is, in other words, the "Aufwertung des individuellen Subjekts" (Zima 2000, 127). His closeness to Nietzsche in regard of the endorsement of a nihilistic stance notwithstanding, Kierkegaard differs from him by appreciating every individual existence.[78] Also, having rescued subjectivity from the all-

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77 There may be one exception though, the *Übermensch*. Although his ideals are not "of this world", that is he does not observe the communal values, this subject nevertheless understands his own values as the absolute ones and also has the stamina to carry them through.

78 His devout observation of Christian values and the consequent "spiritualization" of the Self (*das Selbst*) has been well documented. Cf., among others, Oehm 11 *et passim*.

encompassing systems of Idealism, he struggled against the utter leveling and uniformity of the subject in the coming industrial world.

It is hard to fathom the consequences of these conceptual shifts. It may be described as nothing short of turning the known world and its concepts upside down. The effects were quickly noticed on the level of transcendence. If throughout history the transcendental forces have been thought to reside in the outer world – that is in either nature (pantheisms) or heaven (poly- and monotheisms) – then now, with the instant devolution of this realm and its implosion into the subjectivity, their necessary displacement brought about a previously unknown dimension and, consequently, their crisis. It did away with the deistic notion of transcendence, but not with its realm altogether. Despite Nietzsche's declaration about God's death, the realm could not be eliminated. It was only transformed. This process, best labeled as "the secularization of Fate,"[79] has been primarily ascribed to Schopenhauer, yet it should be considered not only as the secularization of the ancient concept of destiny but also that of the entire Christian theodicy. Although the structure remained the same, the content was appropriated to the measure of human being. In Matei Calinescu's words about Nietzsche's and Ortega y Gasset's comparison of Modernity to Christianity, "the modern 'doctrine of culture' is nothing but 'a Christianity without God'" (193).

Either emphatically emotional or coldly rational, the entire mythology has been modernized. In this sense it is the subject who yearns for a place within that structure. Thus the character and its action are linked again under one umbrella-concept, that of the modern myth because "not only do we find the use of myth in a specifically modern sense, to rationalize a post-Christian metaphysic, but the conversion of the ritual figure to a form of the modern hero: that hero who in liberal tragedy is also the victim, who is destroyed by his society but who is capable of saving it" (Williams 44-45).[80]

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79 Williams 37.

80 A very suitable illustration of this binary connection of the ancient form and the modern content can be seen in this O'Neill's quotation from 1917: "the tragedy of Man is perhaps the only significant thing about him. [...] The individual life is made significant just by the struggle. [...] The struggle of man to dominate life, to assert and insist that life has no meaning outside himself where he comes in conflict with life, which he does at every turn; and his attempt to adapt life to his own needs, in which he doesn't succeed, is what I mean when I say that Man is the hero" (Williams 1966, 116).

3.4 Modernity

Most obviously, utter rationalism and Idealism failed to find final answers. Yet the pressure of the dismantling process was so intense that after its decline both art and conceptual thought turned the other way. This process, specifically Modernism, is handled in this section. The previously gregarious imperative was replaced by total and relentless individualism, even solipsism. Drama thus became the drama of subjectivism.

After the defeat of Hegelian abstract universalism, the disintegration of the connection between the concepts and the systems of values increased in both scope and impact. The previous conventional opinion had been that the "Wertsetzungen die Grundlage der Subjektivität bilden" (Zima 2000, 173) and this was proved to be flawed and, consequently, shunned by both contemporary philosophers as well as artists.[81] The monolithic foundation of the philosophical concepts, in particular that of the subject, has been, after the idealist breakdown, torn to pieces. The subjectivity that used to be, right until Husserl, perceived as a self-evident and obvious now became a blurred, enigmatic and, at best, questionable concept. Since then we have seen "das Auseinandertreten von Geist und Natur, von Subjekt und Objekt; die Verselbständigung der Kontingenz in Zufall und Traum; die Kritik der rationalistischen und hegelianischen Weltvernunft." (Zima 2000, 120).

It has been realized that rationalism or any other idealist construction was not good enough to challenge our concrete realities or, better yet, it could not provide the answers for all human uncertainties and doubts. The successful functioning of idealist philosophy, that is its proper existence functioning within the limits of a system only with rationality as its fundament have been taken to their hermeneutical limits.[82] As a

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81 Well known is Hermann Bahr's exclamation in his article "Das unrettbare Ich" that "das Ich ist unrettbar. [...] Da werden wir erkennen, daß das Element unseres Lebens nicht die Wahrheit ist, sondern die Illusion" (192).

82 In this sense it reminds us of the philosophy of science in which the smallest possible number of philosophical axioms was sought for establishing a logical system, such as Boole's algebra or Russell's logic.

consequence, our situation in the contemporary world is, at best, paradoxical since one is "supremely conscious both of the demand for absolute values and of the impossibility of ever satisfying this demand in the real world" (Goldmann 67-68). As these two have never been reunited, one of the two had to be discarded; this was the exterior, the ideals.

The view towards the outer world was irreparably shaken, the gaze of artists as well as scholars turned inwardly into the subject him/herself. In previous times the attention still paid to the absolute bore witness to the insignificance and smallness of our own humaneness in comparison with the transcendental entity. It was not before this shift that we started realizing the intricacies and depths of our own selves. With the absolute now put aside, we turned our gaze into our existences. Novalis appropriately describes this process in a poetic way as "nach innen geht der geheimnisvolle Weg."[83]

This amounts to the realization that a human being does not need anything but his/herself for the definition of his/herself as a subject, which necessarily leads to an enhanced subjectivism and, *in extremis*, to subjective relativism.[84] This relativism did not come into play right at the beginning of this process of realization but was reserved for the later stages of development.[85] For an instant it seemed that the subject was released from the transcendental bonds still characteristic of the Cartesian concept while being still able to be thoroughly analyzed and identified. Such has been, for example, Georg Simmel's view that he developed in his lectures on Kant: "nicht die Kategorie der

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83 From *Schriften*, Stuttgart 1960-75 (Taylor 427).

84 Needless to say, this process went hand in glove with the contemporary development of society. Cf. Fuch's opinion on page 63. Although at the beginning subjectivity appeared to take the upper hand, with the advancement of industrialization and consequent formation of the market societies the factual insignificance of the subject became increasingly obvious. Complete annihilation of the subjectivity took place, it is predominantly believed, in postmodernism, yet, at this earlier stage, there was still some optimisim to be traced with regard to the endurance of the subject. For more on postmodernism as the ultimate stage of the development of the consumer society cf., among others, Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The cultural logic of late capitalism* and Herbert Marcuse's *One-dimensional Man*.

85 Charles Baudelaire's work has been perceived as the beginning of the dramatic devolution. Cf. in particular, Benjamin's opinion uttered in his *Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* where he maintains that the subject succumbed to the mass-society, experience of a shock, and objectification. Adorno in his *Ästhetische Theorie* supported Benjamin's stance as well. Almost revolutionary in the respect of introducing a character with a completely new quality has been Georg Büchner in his play *Woyzeck*. Also interesting from this view-point is Calinescu's book *Faces of Modernity*, especially 46-58.

Einzelheit, sondern die der Einzigkeit, Unvergleichbarkeit und Unvertretbarkeit macht das Zentrum dieses Individualitätsbegriffs aus" (Oehm 9).

It seemed that the subject could be fully investigated because it was a limited entity and did not represent a world without borders. Yet this idea quickly dissipated under realizations fraught with the sinister notion of the subject becoming vast and incomprehensible. Thus the parallelism of the subject with the world has been recreated, with the distinction that now every singular existence was conceived as a world of its own. At this stage in the process subjectivity had been permanently severed from the outside world. Lukács, for example, asserted that "mit dem Ende jeder Tragödie fällt eine ganze Welt zusammen" (1981, 83). From the opposite point of view, Unamuno did not perceive the world as the limitation of the subject but, rather, the subject as the limitation of the world. Although broader in scope, this subjectivity appeared, quite optimistically, to be controllable and cognizable. Such is Unamuno's rather paradoxical conclusion that "the individual is the end of the Universe" (312). Similarly, Wittgenstein also maintains that "the subject does not belong to the world but it is a limit of the world" (151).[86] Yet, this immanently optimistic view retained validity for only a short time period.

In light of the above mentioned fundamental changes it has become obvious that with the shift in perception of subjectivity, as its corollary, artistic forms, and genres followed. It is thus safe to say with Lukács that "deshalb ist das neue Drama das Drama des Individualismus, der bewußtgewordenen Persönlichkeitsforderung (die Frage nur mehr von künstlerischem Gesichtspunkt betrachtet). Deshalb sind die Überzeugungen, die Ideologien der Menschen künstlerisch so wichtig, weil nur diese den Tatsachen eine symptomatische Bedeutung zu geben [...] vermögen" (1981, 100).

Lukács consciously encouraged the idea of modern tragedy. In his more post-Hegelian than Marxist manner, he saw the essential issue of the present-day version of the genre in the "Gleichgewicht zwischen Menschen und Außenwelt, die Beziehung, in welcher der Mensch zu seiner Tat steht, inwiefern er seine Tat auch wirklich tut" (1981, 85). That is, finally, the subject's conscious decision with regard to his/her actions. This rather Hegel-like statement does indeed perceive the individual as the hub of all his/her

actions. Lukács's subjectivity has become fully conscious since "die Grundlagen des neuen Dramas [...] sind rationale, von seinem Ursprung her ist ihnen keinerlei mystisch-religiöses Gefühl eigen" (1981, 99). Therefore, Williams's conclusion about Lukács that he "shifts the attention from the objective conflict, which is present in the whole action, to the single and heroic personality" (1981, 35) is right on the mark.[87]

Nonetheless, Lukács was not able to favour character over its action since with the broadening of the concept of subject everything else imploded. He says that the "Charakter und Handlung sind untrennbar: die Handlung ist das Schicksal des Helden und der Held ist immer identisch mit seinem Schicksal, er wird gerade in seinem Schicksal wirklich das, was er ist. Charakter und Handlung sind eins" (1981, 35). Because the reproduction of the real tragic action, in order to be aesthetically enjoyed, has to mimic absolutely real-life tragedy, also its characters and their actions too have to be totally believable.[88] The first condition of a subject's being believable is, of course, his/her own conscious determination.

All these shifts brought the theoretical idea of modern tragedy back to life and reestablished its credentials with regard to its relationship to contemporary reality. Ancient mythology had already imposed certain requirements on tragedy as its first and foremost literary genre, which were within the advancing world increasingly difficult to observe. Thus, in addition to the modernization, that is secularization, of the myth a different process was also taking place, namely that of actualization of the position of the subject. Suddenly, the dramatic character has found him/herself in the role of Hegelian substantiality because his/her convictions and ideologies formed the prism of modern vision in drama. The new form of the secularized mythology required that the external realm be transfered to the internal one and, consequently, the "battlefield" to find its

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86 Of interest may be also other passages from his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, namely 5.631-5.634.

87 It is worthy noting that Williams founds his view about the utter tragicality of life upon this line of thought, that is the unyielding division between the individual and actions. Life namely consists of actions and if these are tragic, life itself is even more so. As Wilkoszewska, too, has warned, Williams does not take into account the essential difference between the tragic experience *per se* and its aesthetic reception.

88 It is exactly the point at which the traditional drama was attacked by Brecht. With the "Verfremdungseffekt" (Alienation-effect) his "epic theatre" works precisely on dismounting the

place within the human being, within the modern character. Also, this new alteration brought with it a particular realization about the quality of that fight. If the duel is to be fought within subjectivity, it may as well be hidden from the external world. In other words, not only the externally dynamic action is *per force* tragic. With its internalization the tragic received another form of appearance: that of passivity of action, situational stillness, and external tranquility. The tragic conflict became thus infinitely more complex.

For this important realization it is necessary to return to Hebbel. Since Hamlet's time, the tragic stage has been possessed by characters having to battle first with themselves in order to fulfill their "prescribed" tragic role. Within the old tragic system such a stance did not resonate well. Moreover, it was considered a flagrant breach of the "sacred" rule of character's unmitigated oneness and unity of conviction. In the new world, after subjects had left their mythical cradle together with their monolithic comprehension of the world, they have been allotted the notion of reflection whose normal consequence is, according to the Cartesian supposition, rational doubt. On this basis, Hebbel arrived at his truly seminal realization that "auch ist nicht zu übersehen, daß die Kluft zwischen Handeln und Leiden keineswegs so groß ist, als die Sprache sie macht, denn alles Handeln löst sich dem Schicksal, d. h. dem Weltwillen gegenüber, in ein Leiden auf, und gerade dies wird in der Tragödie veranschaulicht, alles Leiden aber ist im Individuum ein nach innen gekehrtes Handeln" (16). With this concession, tragic characters have been finally relieved from until then, within the field of theory, compulsory and visible action and allowed merely to reflect, ponder, and suffer. Hebbel made obvious the fact that internal suffering may be perceived as tragic for the subject in question as with any other externally oriented observable action. This is particularly valid if we take into consideration the sublime forces within the subject (cf. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche) with their merciless, dark, and raw strength. It was by virtue of this far-sighted perusal that as a form tragedy has been brought back into the present and has been given

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"theatrical" illusion. Also in Brecht's plays it would be difficult to defend the identity of the dramatic characters with their actions.

the chance to catch up with the rest of the world. Through this, tragedy *grosso modo* became once again the genre of the present.

Needless to say, because of the "updating" of tragedy and its inclusion in the modern forms of world and life, it has been realized that also dramatic characters suddenly started fitting the disposition of the genre or, put differently, tragedy does not have to die in order to accommodate contemporary dramatic subjectivities. Hebbelian realization about the activeness of suffering with its necessary consequence, that being the internalization of the conflict, allowed the modern form of subjectivity to be completely included in the genre. Until tragedy had been given this clean "bill of health," it was consistently perceived as an anachronistic genre and, in unison with Nietzsche, the kind of art whose times had ended already back in antiquity. Now, despite the basic fact of tragedy, namely that "das Tragische muß als ein von vornherein mit Notwendigkeit Bedingtes, als ein, wie der Tod, mit dem Leben selbst Gesetztes und gar nicht zu Umgehendes auftreten" (Hebbel 26), the gate was opened for a different, modern type of dramatic subjectivity.

The characters of modern drama, and consequently also those of tragedy, have regained their importance since the difference between the two is, as it will become obvious later, only within their type of conflict. For a conflictual scheme in modern tragedy there is no need for universal support, no necessity for the entire world to share the same hierarchy of values and, consequently, to partake in the axiological schism. It is the hero's private suffering and personal conflict that suffice for modern tragedy. It has been acknowledged and, more importantly, fully accepted that "detached from that hierarchy suffering becomes private, having no meaning beyond the individual of the sufferer" (Drakakis 6). Although that would not present a sufficient *raison d'être* for Attic tragedy, it is necessary or, better yet, the only possible path for its modern rendition. Thus, "die Helden des neuen Dramas sind – im Verhältnis zu den alten – mehr passiv als aktiv [...] ihr Heroismus ist meistens der Heroismus der Verzweiflung, der Not, nicht der des mutigen Drauflosgehens" (Lukács 1981, 90). In other words, "daher wird die bloße Erhaltung des Individualseins, die Integrität der Individualität zum Zentrum des Dramas" (1981, 97).

Consequently, the outcome of the conflict, that is the ancient "reconciliation," which was so heavily emphasized in the Hegelian system, has no other place to appear than on the inside of the character. This does not mean that it is any bit different from the ancient type of reconciliation within the substantiality. It also does not mean that it is worth less because it is supposed to happen only within the subject. Since the subject has become the entire universe in itself, the "whole world," his/her conflict and subsequent reconciliation keep their seminal position. The importance of this shift, such is my opinion, has not been, by virtue of the ancient paradigmatic definitions, adequately appreciated.[89] Williams in his account of this shift, in which a gentle note of nostalgia may be detected, states that the "reconciliation, when it comes, will often be within the character, and will be more complicated, and often less satisfactory, because it is the character as such, and so the personal destiny, which is emphasized above the ethical substance he represents" (34).[90]

Instead of representing only one side of the conflict, the subject internalizes the clash and moves to become the playing field on which these struggles occur. In addition to enabling the conflict to develop in the subject's interior, thus internalizing parties of the conflict, and in addition to representing one of these parties, the subject necessarily comes to embody the contrary side of the conflict as well. In this way, the subject became the perpetrator (of the offence) and the legislator (of the laws against the former) at the same time. Or, with Asmuth's words, "die Psyche der einzelnen Menschen wird gleichsam als richterliche Instanz begriffen" (143). There could be no better an example than, of course, Hamlet. It is on this basis that Lukács can assert that "ehedem hat die

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89 Such is, for example, Abel's opinion registered as late as in 1963. He claims that "authentic tragedy, which can give a stronger feeling of reality than "realism," implies an acceptance of values which contemporary writers are unlikely to hold" (112). It is, in my opinion, really difficult to imagine a more complete stigmatization of modern tragedy.

90 Paradoxically, Goldmann's neo-Marxist position sees eye to eye with the traditional definition of tragedy in supporting the Attic paradigm. Although coming from a totally different perspective than the traditionalists, he ends up maintaining that the "tragic vision occurs only when the two elements of the paradox [...] are both carried to their final conclusion. Thus, a man can live for absolute values, and yet do nothing more than vaguely desire them in this thoughts and dreams. [...] He thus becomes a Romantic character, and such an attitude is completely opposed to any genuine tragedy. Or, on the other hand, a man can spend his life in an attempt to achieve those relative values which are accessible to mankind. [...] But whatever he does, he will not be a tragic character" (67).

Richtung des Wollens die Tragödie hervorgebracht, in der neuen Tragödie genügt die Tatsache des Wollens an sich, sie herbeizuführen" (1981, 97).

Subjective drama

The processes discussed above made the drama of Modernism a fully subjective genre. Yet the pendular movement of societal development pushed the gauge even further towards an extreme position in Modernism. By embracing total relativism, this radical current of Modernism discarded even the subjective fundament and embraced nihilism as its guiding principle. An excellent case in point are Beckett's plays in which any and all traces of a firm point of reference have been erased. Still, that stage did not represent the final stage of evolution of art, which is the subject-matter of the next chapter.

Modernism took the subject to the peak of its individuality and independence in its self-enclosed form. The singularity of subject has come a long way from tearing down the metaphysical structure of the absolute world, through the notion of the world inhabiting the subjectivity, to the realization of Modernism that this singular being does not comprise the "vast and endless" chasms in him/herself but, rather, only his/her own fragile and, in most cases, anxious consciousness. Modernism – here I consider different, even opposite, strains of the current under one concept covering the vast majority of them[91] – drove the notion of the individual subject to the extreme. In other words, nothing but the subject remained. What previously seemed to be a voluntary self-enclosure, now appeared to be a necessary, moreover, inevitable and the only possible metaphysical solitude. In Williams's words, "the paradox of "we die alone" or "man dies alone" is then important and remarkable: the maximum substance that can be given to the plural "we," or to the group-name "man," is the singular loneliness" (1966, 57).

One of the forms of such transcendental lonesomeness was reached in drama with Strindberg's *Ich-Dramatik*. There not only the content but also the form of singular scenes from the individual's life, which are disconnected from each other, show the

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[91] For an interesting suggestion of modernism's dichotomous typology cf. Edward Możejko's article "Literary Modernism: Ambiguity of the Term and Dichotomy of the Movement."

volatility of the subject's existence. Not only should the audience become aware of the final and irreversible cut of the umbilical cord between the people and the world but, in addition, the public should realize the utterly contingent relation of the subject with him/herself. The "I-drama" or, as it has been also called, the "station drama" thus severs its life-support system, that is its relationship to the other, and remains concentrated solely on itself. Szondi aptly defines its position by stating that "die dramatische Szene schöpft ihre Dynamik aus der zwischenmenschlichen Dialektik, sie wird vorwärtsgetrieben dank dem futuristischen Moment, das dieser innewohnt. In der Szene des "Stationendramas" hingegen ensteht keine Wechselbeziehung, der Held trifft zwar auf Menschen, aber sie bleiben ihm fremd" (1969, 47). The predominant pattern of the events within as well as without the subjectivity is utter relativity. Crediting Peter Bürger for the discovery, Zima maintains that "zu den Verdiensten von Bürgers Untersuchung gehört die Erkenntnis, daß das individuelle Subjekt der Moderne monologisch aufgefaßt wird: als Einzelsubjekt ohne Beziehung zum Du, zum anderen" (2000, 84). This statement has also been expressed in quite comparable terms by Williams: "what is generalized is the loneliness of man, facing a blind fate, and this is the fundamental isolation of the tragic hero" (57).

Needless to say, the ultimate destruction of firm form of the subject was accomplished in late Modernism by the plays of Samuel Beckett. His work represents the peak of the desubjectification of protagonists where even the most basic distinguishing traits, such as their proper names, become empty, not even descriptive signifiers. Beckett reached a phenomenal degree of eradication of dramatic heores. Even so small a level of self-awareness, of some immanent sense, and of teleological existence has been removed only to receive a pure depersonified "voice in space." Not only the self-awareness of the protagonist but also the relationship of the protagonist with the surrounding space was eliminated. Thus Beckett obtained emtpy subjects that were anchored neither in themselves nor in the world. Regardless, and particularly for the purpose of my argument, it is important to note that Beckett was at the same time the first and the last dramatist of such utter subjective nihilism. Although he had a few followers, Austrian playwrights such as Peter Handke and Peter Turrini being among them, Beckett remained to be his own measure. There was no other step furhter to be taken, which is why Beckett's plays

may be understood both as an apogee and a turning point in the process of eradication of the subject.

For the moment, the expressionist station-drama has arrived at this solipsism's furthermost point that at the time proved to be the point of no return. The path back into systems had been rejected previously, the route towards the Other has been cut off. It was, then, Modernism that reached the limits of solipsist expression. The concepts it inherited from the previous theoretical deliberations have been effectively worked out. Put differently, the attention paid to the individual as a subject has been entirely consummated. A radically new postmodern turn was imminent. In drama, the necessity of this shift was clearly felt. Attention was about to shift direction, too. Williams recaps this by saying that "we think of tragedy as what happens to the hero, but the ordinary tragic action is what happens through the hero" (55). What can, then, happen through the hero? What can still be realized if the hero, that is the subject, has been thought of as the ultimate limit of the universe? Is there such a thing as the other side of the subject or, perhaps, the universe? These are the questions that the following period, that is Postmodernism, has to deal with. In drama, so uniquely a dual literary genre, these questions seem as pertinent as ever. In the following chapter my efforts will go towards the elucidation of this specific situation.

4. TRAGIC SUBJECT AND TRAGEDY TODAY

This last theoretical chapter of the dissertation has been conceived as a unification of the previously discussed topics, that is the tragedy and the subject. After having explored each of them in more detail, I have brought both trains of thought together here and placed them under scrutiny in the contemporary context. The opening section of the chapter deals with Poststructuralism, one of the strongest critiques of all systems that support firm values. An essential question for the subject in this theoretical current is taken up in the following sub-section, where I return to the changes in the subject's self-constitution. This, in turn, introduces a new turning point in the consideration of subjectivity. For this analysis, both the tradition as well as contemporaneity are taken into account and their qualities considered. As it will become clear later, the essential characteristic of the new subjectivity is considered to be a dialogical binary exchange of positions. Such a pendular movement is in a captivatingly accurate way discussed by the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, who is the object of discussion in the following sub-section. In the last section on contemporary tragedy I bring both concepts together to discuss how the "new" subjectivity can, and also does, work in the "new" tragedy.

This concludes the theoretical part of the dissertation. Yet prior to delving into the analyses of the four chosen concrete cases, I explain my vision of the "updated" modern version of traditional tragedy. Therefore, I maintain, it is necessary to return to the key issue of the idealist view on tragedy, that is the conflict. It is there that I posit that contemporary tragedy rests upon a tragic situation. Conflicts can be, as has become obvious, either external or internal, yet they remain essential for any dramatic play. Therefore, a different entity has to be introduced, which, in my opinion, is this tragic situation. It does not prescribe the quality of the conflict but, rather, refers to its presence. Throughout the dissertation I supported the middle stance. The tragic situation, as I see it, maintains exactly such an epistemological bearing. The idea of the tragic situation is not axiological and evaluative but, rather, hermeneutical and assertive. Therefore, it is not just any catastrophic situation in tragedy or in represented life but it has to fulfill, as I

explain in the final section of this chapter, at least two key conditions: it has to be unavoidable and at the same time irresolvable.

Even though I argue that for contemporary tragedies Aristotelian theory has only a limited validity, there are numerous other qualities that turn the present-day dramatic plays into tragedies.

4.1 Poststructuralism

It was with Poststructuralism that the ideas of the death of different concepts took over the theoretical stage. What in Modernism initially seemed to be a liberating movement away from the "forceful" Idealism and consequently perfect correspondence among the constituent parts ended up as a complete disintegration. The first section is thus devoted to the subject's feelings of "metaphysical solitude." With that, the rationalist, upbeat epistemology, too, was put aside. Instead, deconstructionist hermeneutics took up its stand and introduced a fundamental theoretical skepticism.

The development described in the first two chapters has, of course, did not stop at the complete isolation of the subject. It did not halt there but went further into the disintegration of the concept. The peak of this process has been reached in the high Modernism, followed by the period of Postmodernism. The latter is based on poststructuralist philosophy as it developed in France after the memorable year of 1968.[1] The main common characteristics of this train of thought, its quite significant internal diversity notwithstanding, has been the perception of the concept of subject (together with, perhaps, the individual) not as an autochthonous entity but rather as an instance consisting of and dependent on numerous other, for example, social, political, psychological factors.[2] Theorists supporting these ideas thought of the subject as no more

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1 For this account cf. Ferry and Renaut *Philosophy of the Sixties* (with its original French title *La pensée 68*).

2 Previously the whole concept of subject emerged from the poststructuralist remake "als Produkt von Machtkonstellationen oder Ideologien, als Spielball von unbewußten, libidinalen Impulsen, als Opfer von Diskontinuität und Kontingenz" (Zima 2000, 3-4). As a natural consequence of having discovered an affluence of different relations defining the subject, its immanent contradictoriness has been

than a contingent array of these aspects. In other words, instead of the subject they considered the importance of its component parts. Never again should the carrier of these elements be perceived in its totality since this view appears to be too broad and also too imprecise, not to say idealistic. Taking away from the subject his/her absoluteness, which has been the case since Modernism and is well evidenced as *unitas in pluritudo*, they also discarded the subject's individual idiosyncrasies as burdensome and unnecessary, thereby leaving in its place a non-subject, a virtual non-entity, something, which should not be even called an in-dividual (un-dividable).[3] This radical shift in perspective made the individuality (the source of distinctiveness) and subjectivity (the base for particular determination) appear to these scholars to be truly unnecessary and superseded. The subject is not, they maintain, capable of his/her own delineation and definition, because s/he has always been a part of a larger entity, whose task it has been to identify its subordinated elements and to fill them with the content s/he deems appropriate.[4] The entire world-view of modernity should be understood, following Cascardi's lucid inference, as "a "detotalized" whole" (3), not, as it has become understood later, as defragmented world and therefore a world on the brink of annihilation.[5]

The most instrumental theorist in setting the conditions for these attacks, as I have previously explained, was Nietzsche. His theoretical abolition of absolute instances was the cause of sundry consequences: from making the individual feel liberated to, further

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exposed. This approach views subject as "eine unterworfene oder zerfallende Instanz" (ibid., xi). There no longer is a singular essential subject but sundry relations/discourses among which any and everyone fundamentally influences the concept. Or, in other words, "the condition of subjectivity is defined through the (contradictory) discourses of philosophy, literature, the "science" of politics, religion, and psychology" (Cascardi 2).

3 A cogent and pertinent description of the term is given by Williams. He avers that "*individuus* was used to translate *atomos*, Gk – not cuttable, not divisible. Boethius [...] defined the meanings of *individuus*: "something is called individual, the specific designation of which is not applicable to anything of the same kind, such as Socrates (iii)" [*Porphyrium commentarium liber secundus*]" (1983, 162).

4 In Zima's terms, the move from "Spätmoderne" (that is, modernism as opposed to the modern era in general) to the "Postmoderne" is characterized by the shift from an attitude of ambivalence to the position of indifference where previously significant concepts became simply free of any theoretical weight (cf. especially 2000, xiv).

5 From the postmodern point of view Zima frugally pinpoints three elements which all contributed to the "Krise des modernen Subjekts" and its subsequent disassembling: "1. die immer schwieriger werdende Ausrichtung des individuellen auf einen überindividuellen Subjekt-Aktanten; 2. der

down in the process, his/her feeling lost. Since that moment, the individual has stood in a metaphysical loneliness and abandonment. With the dissolution of the key concept of the axiological system, Nietzsche provoked an avalanche of negations, the majority of them was initiated by the poststructuralist world-view. Very much in line with Nietzsche's vision, the postmodernist theories clamored for the end of history (Fukuyama), and the deaths of subject (Derrida), author (Foucault and Barthes), character (Fuchs) to mention but a few.[6] Their method of staunch rejection was based on a view that the logocentrism of philosophy and its supercilious attitude towards all other human endeavours should be brought to an end. Therefore, today "keine der Kategorien des Rationalismus hat überlebt. Geist, Wille, Endursache, transzendentale Erzeugung, eingeborene Prinzipien, *res extensa* und *res cogitans* gelten der modernen Wissenschaft als Spuk" (Horkheimer 42). Since the highest value is not absolute any more, moreover, since it is available to us no more, the basis from which smaller and subsequent values are to be deduced is missing. With any and every transcendental anchor atrophied, the entire system swiftly fell apart.[7] As a consequence, in place of the previously ubiquitous absolute, that is the subject as the epitome of eternal justice and infinite knowledge, suddenly there appeared an emptiness, a void where there used to be a safe haven. Plumpe, following the debate about modern art, concludes that although the Hegelian idea about the end of art has never truly come to fruition it was brought to bear upon the artistic forms. Thus, he maintains, with the full relativization of the subject and final realization of its societal fundaments "das Ende der Ästhetik als Theorie des absoluten Geistes ist so der Beginn einer Soziologie moderner Kunstkommunikation" (I: 355).

In this vein, Postmodernism introduced a critical approach to the questions of traditional philosophy and art. Furthering those already quite advanced destructive modernist views on age-old values, postmodernists saw these questions as devoid of any

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allmähliche Zerfall kollektiver Wertsysteme; 3. die diesen Prozeß begleitende Entwertung der Sprache, die als Grundlage der Subjektivität immer brüchiger wird" (2000, 31).

6 It comes as small surprise that Nietzsche has been hailed as one of the most important forefathers of postmodernism.

7 There have been attempts at creating ultimate values based on human understanding of our own selves, for example, Kant's categorical imperative, but they served only as another utopian effort. This has been proved by the consecutive disappointments of utopias such as the French revolution, and most recently, Socialism/Communism.

fundamental significance, leaving them, in addition to irony, with notions of a play (Baudrillard), a consequence of societal power structures (Foucault), one of many discourses in a sociolect (Derrida, Lyotard) etc. Previously hailed totality, firmness and absoluteness were replaced by partiality, indetermination and contingency. What has surfaced as truly important was not essentiality of the concept but, rather, its positionality, that is the relations in which the concept is entangled. The concept in its formation and definition relies upon these relations. I see Poststructuralism as the basic theoretic and philosophical orientation of the postmodern era and, more specifically, of that art, which rejected the ever-developing spiraling dialectic construction of the world. Instead, it introduced a reverse process of deconstruction. Within the scheme of the world, it claims, nothing can be eventually understood without this meticulous process of "de-fining," the "de-constructing," which brings up to the surface minute particles and shows their interdependence within their mutual relations. The same can be traced for a larger process, such as evolution. Poststructuralism claims that no consequent change of the world can be read only as a temporary developmental stage on the path of evolution but, contrarily, as a firm and definitive termination with the previous form, a next solid step in the process of the deconstruction of the preceding entity.[8] The ultimate consequence of this stance has become a steady, relentless process of deconstructing. In his flamboyantly traditionalist defense of tragedy against its postmodernist denigrations, Roche ironically subsumes the principles of Poststructuralism, "assaults on universals have themselves become almost universal" (1998, 3).

With the advancement of Poststructuralism, the concept of subject ceased to exist because Poststructuralism's basis was the critique of the modern-era philosophy from Descartes to Husserl or even Sartre.[9]

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8 Cf., for example, Ihab Hassan's juxtaposition of the essential points of postmodernism.

9 This enterprise of modernity becomes obvious when considering the "modernity's prominent goals: attempts to conceptually define modern values of the subject as rational self-consciousness and politically in the liberal State" (Cascardi 6). In his benevolent stance towards the critique of Poststructuralism, Cascardi defines the modern-era Cartesian concept of subject as a "historically contingent phenomenon [...] [which] attempts to transform contingency into necessity, as part of an effort to legitimize itself" (5).

Self-Constitution

As a consequence of poststructuralist theory and postmodern art the essential component that breaks down, with respect to the subject, is the concept's self-constitution. Foucault, for example, maintains that the subject cannot make any claims with regard to its singular essence since the basic characteristic of the new subjectivity is its polysemity, its external identification. Just how extreme such stances became I delineate through Ute Guzzoni's claim that we should cease to exist as subjects. Still, such radical ideas do more harm than good to the theories they seemingly support. Although it is true, as I show in this section, that the autonomy of the subject was temporarily lost, it was hardly annihilated. Throughout history there have been parallel theories that did indeed admit the ending of speculative philosophy, yet did not neglect those previous ideas altogether. Thus, as some of the mentioned theoreticians proved, the absolute can be saved without falling back into the past totalizing, cognitive modes. For such a stance I give the example of Sartre and, later in this chapter, also Lévinas. The self can still be rescued outside the dominance of Poststructuralism yet without unconditionally embracing again the old. This achievement can be accomplished, as I show later, through the declaration of the experience of the "I" as universal. In a world uncannily resembling the world of Leibnizian monads, one individual is as universal as the other. Therefore, vertical hierarchy may no longer exist.

What falls prey to the demise of the subject is the category of its self-constitution or, better yet, self-preservation. Representing the process of the construction of subjectivity, this self-constitution, too, can occur on both levels: the ontological and the deontological. On the one hand, it refers to the absolute "idea" of our own being (*Sein*), which exists regardless of our own knowledge of its concrete embodiment, whereas on the other, by virtue of its dual nature, it is hardly less bound to the reality and the promotion of the states of being in real-life. If, in the first case in point, it refers to the level of pure ontology, in the second it is irrevocably linked with the realm of ethics.[10]

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10 This stance is well informed also, among others, by Dieter Henrich who states that "am stoischen Theorem der *conservatio sui* läßt sich schon ablesen, daß es Unterscheidung und Vereinigung von

By virtue of the constituent parts of the self-constitution, which echo the qualities of Enlightenment, that is constituting the subject in its form of a rational, autonomous, absolute individual, it is quite obvious that it had to be questioned by Poststructuralism. The principle surfaces in Modernism because of a specificity that it grants the subject, namely the absolute, individual rational freedom. Self-preservation could hardly appear in, for example, Hegel's system because there everything is subject to a higher principle of subjectivity. This concept is "das vernünftige Prinzip sowohl des individuellen als des staatlichen Lebens [...] [Es] opponiert der teleologischen Deutung der menschlichen Natur in einem Universum, das als Zwecksystem aufgefaßt ist" (Henrich 1997a, 99). It was only after Hegel that full authority was bestowed on the subject.

The problem in question is the subject's position with regard to its self-knowledge. Most instrumental in the critique of the absoluteness and showing the polysemity of the subject has been Michel Foucault. For him, the subject cannot be construed from within but solely from without. It is the social strata with their multifarious sub-strata of politics, religion, culture, economy etc. that all add their respective shares to the construct that we, by virtue of automatism, have chosen to call the subject. Furthermore, the idea of the subject after Modernism does not appear to be geared solely towards the social strata. If each and every level constitutes and is perceived as a discourse, then the subject does not remain on the level of social phenomena but, rather, moves further down onto, among others, the plane of language. As Foucault asserts, "bref, il s'agit d'ôter au sujet (ou à son substitut) son rôle de fondement originaire, et de l'analyser comme une fonction variable et complexe du discours" (1994, 811). All along, it has been Foucault's position that the subject can be understood exclusively as a discoursive entity.[11] The multitude of discourses turns out to

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zwei Bedeutungselementen verlangt. Das eine leitet sich aus einer Ethik her, welche die sittliche Aufgabe des Menschen in die Erhaltung und Entfaltung seiner eigentümlichen Wesensverfasseung legt. Das andere ergibt sich daraus, daß diese Aufgabe nur aufgrund eines Wissens erfüllt werden kann, das sich in seiner Struktur von der Kenntnis der Welt oder der reinsten Ordnung der Dinge unterscheidet" (1976b, 303-304).

11 Although such has been a prevalent view of Foucault's philosophy, yet, as some have warned, even the philosopher himself in his last phase, turned towards embracing the venture point of enlightenment. Mark Poster claims that in his last period, Foucault "from the dispersal of the subject in discourse [...] moved to the issue of the "constitution of the self" in discourse" (54).

be part and parcel of the subject that can, therefore, never be seen as a homogenous instance. Put differently, "since the condition of subjectivity is intimately tied to individuals [...] the autonomy of the various discourses in the modern age inevitably shows up as contradictions within the subject-self" (Cascardi 3), which, in turn, leads to the conclusion that "Subjektivität kann nicht länger idealistisch als statische Konstante aufgefaßt werden, der die Variablen der Wirklichkeit als Objekte gegenüberstehen" (Zima 2000, 80). Our world as that of subjectivities has become unstable, if not even fluid.

It is no wonder, then, that statements such as the following one have appeared and, moreover, have been taken seriously, their questionable accuracy, scholarly eccentricity, and emotional charge notwithstanding. Ute Guzzoni, for example, posits a rhetorical question "do we still want to be subjects?" which she answers:

> In my view, no. As subjects Europeans discovered and colonized foreign continents, Christians converted other peoples, men disciplined their wives, and husbands and wives disciplined their children. As subjects individuals have suppressed their own inclinations and needs, while generalities have excluded those elements which could not be incorporated. I believe that we can no longer want to be subjects. But this does not mean that we can renounce questioning ourselves and asking what things would be like, were we to learn to accept ourselves as fallible and not all-determining mortals (215).

Even if the more than dubious reliability of this statement is disregarded, its author has committed another rather grave error. On the one hand, she does not refrain from bashing the subject in its many forms of what has been recognized by postmodernist thinkers as the traditional forms of oppression, yet on the other, in an equally high-pitched tone, she utters the historically and theoretically problematic form of a personal pronoun, that is the "I," and goes on using it in its plural form that is no less questionable. The consequences one can draw from this are twofold: either the descriptors Guzzoni uses, that is the "I" and "we," are fraught with a different meaning than they grammatically usually tend to signify or, Guzzoni does not consider herself, that is her "I" to be a subject.

Guzzoni appears to be a victim of the process of deconstruction or "desubstantiation" (Fuchs 3) as it has also been dubbed.[12] This process has been seen in Postmodernism as the way towards liberation from the oppressive controlling structures of the past, such as the hegemonic power of the West, men's control over women, white man's colonialism etc. Yet this is, according to Fuchs, a much more subtle process than mere relativization. Subtle in a sense that in addition to neutralizing the traditional sources of power and hegemony, in addition to divesting one's own subjectivity of the layers of its self-consciousness, thus making it infinitely free and so bringing long-awaited solace, this process has been expected to bring along with it some degree of liveliness and playfulness. The "I," whatever it has come to mean after the revealiong of the emperor's true clothes, has freed itself from the ball and chain of its absolute definition. This, in turn, has made it become the source of endlessly frivolous games of accidental recombinations of the ingredients of what used to be called the subjectivity. This playfulness comes with a lack of rules, the multiplicity of material to draw upon, and the freedom of imagination. Regardless of the amount of freedom that new subjectivities have been given, an endlessly revolving "desubstantiation" appears rather as a Pyrrhic victory. Namely, how can an "I" be constructed if there is nothing to construct it from? Or, in Bürger's words, "das Subjekt, das sich von allen Zwängen und Regeln des Gestaltens befreit hat, findet sich schließlich zurückgeworfen auf eine leere Subjektivität. [...] das Resultat [bleibt] zufällig im schlechten Wortsinne, d. h. beliebig. *Der totale Protest gegen jedes Moment des Zwanghaften führt das Subjekt nicht in die Freiheit der Gestaltung, sondern nur in die Beliebigkeit*" (91, emphasis added). Zima asked himself in retrospect the same question. While quoting Szondi's words about the debacle of modernist drama, namely that "in Trümmern liegt alles: der Dialog, das Formganze, die menschliche Existenz" (Szondi 1969, 90) he continues to question himself whether "ist ein Spiel inmitten dieses Trümmerhaufens vorstellbar?" The answer is obvious: "die Postmodernen bejahen diese Frage" (both quotes from 2000, 79),

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[12] There Fuchs continues by saying that "in retrospect one can see that its [that is, of postmodernism] great unifying trait was not so much nihilism or even relativism, as postmodernism's most vehement critics have charged, but a theme more subtle (yet also more observed) that could be thought of as "desubstantiation."

acknowledging thus a feeling of a postmodern "merry apocalypse." This joyous atmosphere of infinite playing devoid of any degree of responsibility whatsoever, is also confirmed by Geuss who writes "while dissolution of our identity and individuality is in one sense what we fear most, it is *also* potentially the highest and most intense kind of pleasure. [...] Presumably the pleasure results from the fact that in losing our individuality we are (if Schopenhauer is right) returning to our original state, a state which is metaphysically speaking what we always *really* were" (xviii).

If self-preservation, or *conservatio sui*, has been since the beginning linked with rationality and mind, and also with self-constitution, when both concepts lost their essential position the subject had to inevitably fall apart.[13] Everything that formerly appeared to be a firm concept was now revealed to be merely a construct. It was a construct of self-illusion. Or, as Fuchs put it, "nothing "out there," no one "in here." The interior space known as "the subject" was no longer an essence but it was flattened into a social construction or marker in language, the unoccupied occupant of the subject position" (3). The subject became a hollow structure devoid of any significant content. What it lost was its autonomy, or in Badiou's words, "the question therefore bears upon the critique or deconstruction of interiority, of self-presence, of consciousness, of mastery, of the individual or collective property of an essence. Critique or deconstruction of the firmness of a *seat* (*hypokeimenon, substantia, subjectum*) and the certitude of an *authority* and a *value* (the individual, a people, the state, history, work)" (1991, 4). What this shows is that in Poststructuralism and, consequently, in Postmodernism subjective consciousness as fundament of *conservatio sui* no longer is viable. Instead, the control over self-constituting of the subject has been handed over to an external, infinitely more volatile relations. Here, both concepts gain phenomenal importance: first of all, the

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[13] Interestingly enough, for Jaspers, the disappearance of fixed values does not sway the entire structure of the world but, instead, introduces a new dimension to the understanding of traditional subjectivity. While still worried about the modernist rejection of the subject, he cannot comprehend its factual and increasingly forceful negation. It is on this basis that he may contend that "where all meaning disappears, and all certainty vanishes, something arises deep inside man: the self-preservation of his essential identity. This identity preserves itself through endurance – "I have to meet my destiny in silence" – and through the courage to live and the courage, at the limits of the possible, to die with dignity" (1953, 77). His position does not take into account the contemporary changes with regard to subjectivity and very much remains within the circle of speculative idealism.

control-levers have been moved *outside* the subject and, most significantly, outside the subject's "*conscious* control."

The postmodern approach to subjectivity epitomized by Foucault was not such a radical novelty but, on the contrary, a logical conclusion of the previous development. The premonition of the subject's doom had been uttered already at the height of Modernism. This was largely due to the ambivalent nature of the period. Horkheimer draws attention to the fact that Hermann Bahr's statement of the "unrettbar Ich" (1976)[14] has been actually repeated more than three decades later by Ernst Mach. The "I" is not ever to be rescued in its rational cognitive form.[15] Exactly the same conclusion has been reached by Charles Taylor who avers that from the point of view of contemporary theory, "a total and fully consistent subjectivism would tend towards emptiness: nothing would count as a fulfillment in a world in which literally nothing was important but self-fulfillment" (507).[16] The individual subject in its self-reflecting as well as self-preserving form cannot be saved. Following Roland Barthes's words, "today, the subject apprehends himself elsewhere, and "subjectivity" can return at another place on the spiral: deconstructed, taken apart, shifted without anchorage: why should I not speak of "myself" since this "my" is not longer "the self"?" (168)[17] thus reveal the Postmodernism's incapability of a reconciliatory approach. Desmond, for example, likening hermeneutics of the deconstructive stratagem of disbelief to the doubting epistemological stance of skepticism, concludes by saying that "skepticism, like deconstruction, tends to give us breakdown without breakthrough" (163). It is no wonder, then, that through its negation of a certain sort of independence of the human being,

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14 Cf. footnote 81 on page 105.

15 Horkheimer's quotation is worthy bringing up because "die Kategorie des Individuums, an die trotz aller Spannung die Idee der Autonomie geknüpft war, hat der großen Industrie nicht standgehalten. Die Vernunft ist soweit zerfallen, wie sie die ideologische Projektion eben der schlechten Allgemeinheit war, an der die scheinbar autonomen Subjekte jetzt ihre Nichtigkeit erfahren. Der Zerfall der Vernunft und der des Individuums sind eines. "Das Ich ist unrettbar" und der Selbserhaltung entschwindet ihr Subjekt" (1976, 56). Mach's quote was taken form his *Die Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältnis des Physischen zum Psychischen*, Jena 1922, 22.

16 Cf. also Zima 2000, 90.

17 What Barthes hailed as an achievement of postmodern theory, Georg Simmel perceived much earlier, but with a heavily negative connotation. He claimed that "das Geld fragt nicht nur nach dem, was ihnen allen gemeinsam ist, nach dem Tauschwert, der alle Qualität und Eigenart auf die Frage nach dem bloßen Wieviel nivelliert" (194).

poststructuralist and Postmodernism earned in theoretical circles such epitomes as "post-rational" (Rapp), "anti-philosophical" (Desmond) and, above all, "anti-humanist" (Nancy et al.) theories.

Since the new currents have made untenable the complete liquidation (devolution) of the traditional concepts, the question, such as the one chosen by Nancy for the title of the book he had edited, come as no surprise. Thus, with him, we can, almost rhetorically, ask "who comes after the subject" (1991, 5).[18] It is important to pay attention to the interrogative pronoun "who" since, after its conceptual annihilation in its return, is not reified but, rather, personalized. Today the battle over the subject revolves around two possible explanations of its concreteness, that is either its "thing-ness" (objectivity) or its "human-ness" (subjectivity). This issue reveals the level and the seriousness of the critique directed against Poststructuralism.[19]

The impact of this ultimate and radical relativization or, for that matter, "desubstantiation" was so deep that it was not before the early nineteen-eighties that voices were heard in support of a more moderate, if not even quite traditional scholarship.[20] Firstly, as I have already mentioned, the critique touched upon more principal matters. It has become obvious that if this theory is to be carried through consistently and without potential lenience towards certain concepts (cf. Guzzoni's quote above), it would simply not stop before deconstructing itself. This theoretical *perpetuum*

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18 He goes even further in analyzing or, better, explaining this question by stating that "one of the major characteristics of contemporary thought is the putting into question of the instance of the "subject," according to the structure, the meaning, and the value subsumed under this term in modern thought, from Descartes to Hegel, if not to Husserl. [...] A wide spread discourse of recent date proclaimed the subject's simple liquidation" (1991, 5).

19 A seminal direction that has been taken by the critics of Poststructuralism is geared towards the plane of ethics. Although I shall deal with this later, let me only mention here that they claim subject is the plane on which both the ontological as well as the deontological elements meet. Nancy maintains that "the dominant definition of the philosophical (or "metaphysical") *subject* is to my way of thinking the one proposed by Hegel: "that which is capable of maintaining within itself its own contradiction". [...] Before the subject of a predication (let us say: before the *subject-of*) there is (*il y a* – this is Lévinas's "word" – Heidegger's word is: *es gibt*, it is given, it gives) the Being of the subject, or the subject without "of", the subject-being, existence. Metaphysics, de-constructing itself (this is its logic *and* its history), indicates this "before" as "after:" existence. Not the subject of existence but existence-subject: that to which one can no longer allot the grammar of the subject nor, therefore, to be clear, allot the word "subject" (1991, 6).

20 In addition to Luc Ferry's and Alain Renaut's *La pensée 68*, also Christopher Norris's book *What's Wrong with Postmodernism* (1990) has to be mentioned.

mobile, dividing itself like fractals into oblivion, eradicates its own point of reference, its own point of departure because what is perpetuating itself is the process of deconstruction. Time and again, there are always new, more infinitesimal levels on which it can operate, that can be likened to the famous examples of ancient Zeno's aporias. Yet this does not in itself mean that with shifting the stress to the procedure, the concept, or what it stands for, necessarily may cease to exist. It may well be suppressed but it cannot be dispensed with since it is the key element in this equation and getting rid of it would fatally unsettle the entire equilibrium. In short, even though deconstruction does not want to admit this wholeheartedly, as a tool it needs something to deconstruct. Unless there is no individual subject, no compound entity to take asunder, there may be no deconstruction since there is nothing for it to work upon. There has to be, logically, an element that can really be "in-dividual," that could then move from one level to another without experiencing any particular harm. Yet again, such a statement goes against the crux of deconstruction.

The vicious circle of this theoretical tool has been recognized also by, for example, Roche who pays particular attention to the traditional concept of form, namely "even the dissolution of form must serve the meaning of the work; otherwise, the work is not art. [...] Even the negation of form is form" (26). In other words, the problem cannot be solved from outside. It can be either accepted together with attempts to modify it in accordance with the contemporary relativistic views, or abandoned altogether. Very similarly, this shortcoming has been recognized also by Horkheimer who aptly drives his point home with regard to the "desubstantiation" maintaining that "indem die Vernunft die Begriffsfetische zerstört, kassiert sie schließlich den Begriff ihrer selbst" (1976, 42). Even though postmodern critique has been geared against rationality, that is the mind as the Cartesian fundament of the modern-era subjectivity, it was precisely this power of mind on which all the deconstructive processes hinged. At the end of the deconstructive exercise rationality should abdicate and itself become the object of the process of deconstruction. Yet this is not feasible because the process cannot repeat itself *ad infinitum*. The ongoing process has to halt somewhere and when that happens, what we are confronted with is some kind of subjectivity again. Horkheimer thus continues, "ehemals war sie [die Vernunft] das Organ der ewigen Ideen, denen Irdisches nur wie

Schatten gleichen sollte. Die Vernunft sollte in den Ordnungen des Seins sich wiedererkennen, die unverrückbare Form der Wirklichkeit entdecken, in der die göttliche Vernunft zum Ausdruck kam" (1976, 42).

If the first level of criticism, as I have shown, was directed *ad rem*, the second one, which is going to be discussed here, has discovered inconsistencies in the comprehension of larger issues, most notably in history. The suggested critique gives advantage to the synchronic, that is contemporary reception, yet it still warns of an overconfident and perhaps even arrogant neglect of the historical perspective. This is what Lévinas calls infinity as opposed to totality. It is why, I maintain, one should be aware of one's present-day ontological, epistemological, and ethical conditions, one should be aware of the tradition without placing it on a pedestal. History is an integral part of contemporaneity which is why they both, past and present, are mainly considered part and parcel of the same unified process. If one is stopped, the other halts as well. By virtue of this quality of the process, Fukuyama's expressive statement about the end of history cannot be acceptable. Interestingly, his idea had been questioned in advance by Sartre when he wrote that "toute entreprise vécue se solde par un échec par la simple raison que l'histoire continue" (1966, 34). How, then, can there be an end to something that basically cannot come to a halt? This quite radical reading of Fukuyama's position may also be seen with more empathy. Namely, history cannot be seen as an excuse for the accumulation of hegemonic arguments of Idealism and, therefore, as a position of absolute power. It is not a unified flow but consists of scattered occurrences, therefore it should not be taken as an absolute end in itself but, rather, only as a relative point of reference. That allows us to see history as a succession of moments of subjective experience. And these moments are the ones that may become subject to change. Yet this change does not automatically mean the end of their carrier, the subject. On the contrary, one and the same individual subject, once he/she has been relieved from the past forms of reality, is liberated only to subsume another form. This has been noted by Zima who writes that "gerade in spätmodernen und postmodernen Gesellschaften religiöse, ideologische, wissenschaftliche und mediale Strömungen recht kurzlebig sind und *durch ihre sporadisch auftretenden Zusammenbrüche und Konstellationwechsel Subjektivität stets von neuem freisetzen*" (2000, 21). The change means the next developmental stage.

Therefore, Zima further states, "dies führt dazu, daß ein und dasselbe Individuum in der Lage ist, verschiedene ideologische Identitäten – nacheinander oder auch parallel – kritisch und selbstkritisch zu reflektieren und zu relativieren" (ibid.). Constant development, infinite relationality thus come to the fore. With some distance from the epicenter of Postmodernism the critics realized that postmodern theory did lean towards radical solutions. In its untoward vehement conviction that human rationality essentially contributes to the (self)constitution of an individual subject, the postmodern notion claims to have superceded this shortcoming. Regardless, Desmond, for example, still maintained that

> the anti-philosophical philosophy of deconstruction does some of its main business in bringing philosophy to aporia: making philosophy acknowledge that it too, in the end, is brought to loss; that thought is being at a loss which sometimes hides its own loss in dialectical rationalizations. Of course there is some truth in this. But I say: philosophy had *already* always been at this point: always at a loss. This is the very perplexity that generates thought, that in turn is always deconstructing itself. This too reflects the skeptical principle in all genuine thinking (163).

As much doubt as needed was already an essential part of philosophy. Deconstruction brought it to new intensity.

A logical and necessary consequence of this poststructuralist move has been, as I have laid out above, a devolution or, better still, an implosion of subjectivity. It then comes as no small surprise that poststructuralist or, for that matter, postmodernist thought has been labeled as "anti-humanist." To negate the essence of the human being and to belittle his/her self may initially appear as an appealing move towards resolving the timeless ontological problems, yet, at the same time, it signifies nothing less than shifting the problems onto a different level where they can be investigated in an atypical way but not resolved automatically. The delusion of the final answer was very short-lived before theorists such as Manfred Frank and Desmond started spotting inconsistencies and contradictions. Frank thus reveals that "Derridas Angriff auf die Idee der Präsenz [als Sinnpräsenz und subjektive Identität] nicht nur radikal, sondern *zu* radikal ist. Ohne den Rückbezug auf ein Moment relativer Sich-selbst-Gleichheit wäre Differenzierung

(Sinnverschiebung, metaphorische Bedeutungsneueinschreibung) gar nicht feststellbar, sie wäre kriterienlos und vom Zustand der völligen Beharrung ununterscheidbar" (1987, 35). The concept of "self-identity," signifying nothing less than the aforementioned "self-constitution" of the individual, appears to be the *conditio sine qua non* in terms of understanding the subjectivity.

Poststructuralist theory does indeed talk about the subject yet its understanding has shifted so far from the classical vision of the subject that between the two yawns a deep chasm. Therefore, the question as to whether the negation of or, better yet, the non-admission of certain planes of traditional ontology does indeed eliminate them altogether has been frequently posited. In other words, does the failure to see the problem signify the same as if the problem would not exist? As many a critic pointed out, this may simply not be the case. Although willingly admitting that "an irrevocable step forward has been made through the critique of earlier concepts of the subject, a critique thoroughly based on the notion that truth is not a qualification of knowledge nor an intuition of the intelligible" (25), Alain Badiou emphasizes that the position of the subject is geared towards the concept of the truth. The truth, which is only the truth of the concept, the truth of self-realization and, consequently, self-constitution. To present Badiou's point of departure adequately, a lengthier quotation is called for:

> Is it possible to de-objectify the space of the subject? [...] The subject is *woven* out of a truth, it is what exists of truth in limited fragments. A subject is that which a truth passes through, or this finite point through which, in its finite being, truth itself passes. This transit excludes every interior moment. [...] While it is impossible in our era to identify "truth" with a status of cognitive statements, it cannot be inferred that we can thereby go beyond what modern thought (post-Galilean or post-Cartesian) has designated as its own locus using the term "subject" (ibid.).

In this way then, the notion of self-constitution may be restored to its previous pride of place. The "knowing-of-oneself," "realization-of-the-self," have always been understood as the core of any full-fledged subjectivity. In the clarity of self-knowing it is solely the information about the self that carries any weight while everything else ceases to be important. The reason for that lies simply in the fact that this clarity is of

significance exclusively for the subject constituting his/her own self because it is an immanent revelation with no external contingencies whatsoever. It is important to note that this self-constitution reaches the subject's self prior to any external relations. This specificity works the other way around, too. Since it relates only to my own self, any external gesture may only make my-self become conscious of my own being and, under no circumstances, of the being of the other. Thus my self-realization is internal and works only within my-self. Although the "membrane" between the exterior and the interior of subjectivity is not impassable, self-realization appears to be the primary instance. With this realization, another central characteristic of subjectivity is highlighted. Since any and all external attempts at crossing this border and directly influencing the creation of subjectivity should necessarily fail, the latter depends solely upon itself. This is not to say that the echoes of the exterior world do not penetrate and leave, at least, some traces, yet the act of construction has to be done by the self-creating subject. Therefore, deconstruction's taking away from the individual subject of all his/her powers, from that of decision to that of construction, appears to be a rather far-fetched and flawed theory. As has become clear, neither the external forces nor the endlessly analyzing process are able to make any head way into the subjectivity and thus influence its own constituting.

Even though such an essentialist view has been characteristic for the classical, that is the speculative, idealistic philosophical tradition, it has remained at the core of the problem later, after subjectivity had already lost firm ground. Regardless, this essential accountability to the self has been seen as seminal also by Heidegger in his thought, of which Dieter Henrich writes:

> Selbstbewußtsein [...] wird nun von Heidegger als die reinste Form eines Vorliegens in der Anwesenheit aufgefaßt, in der das Vorliegende zugleich schlechthin verfügbar ist. Denn Selbstbewußtsein ist Wissen der Wissenden nur von sich, somit ein widerstandsloses Wissen reiner Klarheit, in der alle Fremdheit gegenüber dem Gegenstand verschwundedn ist. Zugleich ist dieses Wissen verfügbar: Es ist jederzeit zu erlangen und muß dem, der Wissen von sich hat, als das Produkt seiner Leistung zugerechnet werden. Denn ein anderer kann mich immer nur dazu veranlassen, daß ich mir

meiner selbst bewußt werde. Bewirken kann er dieses Bewußtsein nicht. Es muß von mir selber hergestellt werden (1976a, 110).

Today, it seems obvious that there is a subjective fundament of an individual, which has to be left outside any range of external influence. Yet even though it has been realized that this fundament has to be unquestionably absolute for its carrier and for him/her only, its scrutiny did not fail to reveal its weak points. Very instructive in this sense is Sartre's defense of Kierkegaard's writing on the subject where Sartre himself struggles with this notion of subjectivity that was already then coming so utterly out of vogue. He struggles with consolidation of concrete existence as being more important than the speculative essence, that is with the concept of exteriority's aprioriness. Once again, one may perceive the duel between two sides that has all the ingredients of the later postmodernist conflict, yet instead of complete negation and total denial there is, at Sartre's stage, only partial rejection. The problem crystallizes around the question with regard to the way that the individual subject should receive his/her ultimate knowledge of him/her-self, that is his/her self-realization. How, if he/she is only "thrown-into-being," can this subject receive the absolute confirmation of his/her truth of existence? What can such an overriding notion be hinged upon, unless there is something, which refers to the traditional metaphysical essence? Their seeming differences notwithstanding, these two concepts appear to be rather commensal qualities. Sartre's angle of approach is astonishingly similar to the ones undertaken by Badiou and also Henrich. It rests on the idea of the subjective truth that, since it is the only truth for the subject in question, may not appear to him/her otherwise than in an absolute way. Moreover, it is the individual subject who has to construct this notion of him/herself for his/her own self. There simply cannot be any extrinsic factors involved, as everything relies on one's own vision.

While speaking of Kierkegaard, Sartre refers to Hegel's notion of the system that necessarily operates on the level of predeterminacies (cf. previous chapter). Thus, Sartre says, using personal names in order to elucidate the relation among concepts, "Kierkegaard *prévu* par Hegel n'est qu'un exemple privilégié de ces déterminations ontologiques qui préexistent à la naissance et le laissent *conceptualiser*" (1966, 26). For Hegel, obviously, such determinacies made the individual subject part of the universal history. It is through them that any and every subjectivity is linked to the absolute and,

Sartre sees it as a necessary reduction of the absolute to the being through which this being receives its concrete totality. He avers that "traitée d'avance par Hegel, la subjectivité devient un moment de l'esprit objectif, une détermination de la culture. Mais si rien de vécu ne peut echapper au savoir, sa *réalité* demeure irréductible. En ce sens le vécu comme réalité concrète se pose comme *non-savoir*. Mais cette négation du savoir implique l'affirmation de soi-même" (1966, 28).

This affirmation of the self can be proven, as it already had been once by Descartes, through the counterpoint with the absolute as its negativity, that is the Cartesian doubt or, put in a more contemporary fashion, "non-vérité." The effusive totality of the absolute, when brought to life, instantly becomes reduced to its single view, thus negating its own fundamental characteristic of wholeness and turning against the ideal of truth. At the same time, the individual subject is filled with his/her content to the utmost limit. The subject becomes its own hermeneutic content and limit. Thus, the only way to measure the absolute is through the subject. The concept is as close as we can get to the real absolute or, put differently, the only absolute we, as humans, can reach is our own, by its singulariness forcefully limited, but still – for us – absolute. In Sartre's words, "la subjectivité n'est *rien* pour le savoir objectif puisqu'elle est non-savoir, et pourtant l'echec montre qu'elle existe absoluement" (1966, 35-36).

Once it has been constructed, the subjective absolute cannot be eternal, yet it still braves the passage of time. Within its own limits, it is sufficiently secure not to question itself time and again. By appropriating Heidegger's "throwness-into-being," I may relate to Sartre's views on subjectivity as the "throwness-into-time," since being is indelibly marked by time. In a way similar to Fichte (cf. p. 152 *et passim*), the personal pronoun "I" is geared towards its temporal existence, towards its being-in-time. Therefore, in the case of subjectivity, time stands surety for its existence and, consequently, for its being absolute. Yet the subjectivity "in time" is not temporary but temporal. Namely, "le moment de vérité subjective est un absolu temporalisé mais transhistorique. La subjectivité, c'est la temporalisation elle-même; c'est *ce qui m'arrive*, ce qui ne peut être

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elle ne l'est point, même le monde entier l'eût-il sue" (1966, 26).

qu'en arrivant; c'est moi dans la mesure où je ne peux naître qu'à l'aventure" (Sartre 1966, 28).

The new perspective on subjectivity as a self-reflecting and auto-reflexive entity has been supported, among others, also by Manfred Frank who, referring to Poststructuralism, suggests that by cutting this self-fulfilling relationship the critics of subjectivity destroyed the concept as well. Self-realization is nothing less than the conscious intellectual self-constitution, the becoming of the self through the intellectual powers of one's own mind. He writes, "selbst die sogenannten Kritiker von Subjektivität – z. B. Heidegger und Derrida – haben nie ernstlich in Frage gestellt, daß der Sachverhalt Subjektivität als Autoreflexivität des Vorstellens korrekt beschrieben sei" (1991, 23-24).

Regardless of the fact that the postmodern nihilistic stance has been recently rejected and new paths have opened up in order to reach again the *substratum* of our own selves, the poststructuralist placing of these concepts under question remains a non-negligible issue. As the "pendulum" of scholarship prepares to strike back, the middle road becomes obvious. In other words, it is safe to say that the external influences are far from being spurious and false. Yet, on the other hand, the subject itself with its essential core is not as obsolescent as it may appear.[22]

The perception of subjectivity has thus come a full circle. From the subject's foundation in rationality (Descartes), through the idealist absolute establishment in the speculative reason (Kant and particularly Hegel), through the sharp critique and gradual distancing from that ideal (Kierkegaard, Heidegger), to an equally sharp denunciation of any involvement of rationality and reason in the constitution of the concept (Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Barthes etc.), to, in the end, a return to the position of the realization of the subject's dual epistemological nature (emerging critics of deconstruction, such as Christopher Norris). While, for example, Sartre has maintained that the essential core of

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22 Such a middle theoretical path has been very clearly stressed as well as supported also by Zima who claims that "vor allem das spätmoderne oder nachmoderne Subjekt eine labil geschichtete, von Zerfall und Vereinnahmung bedrohte Einheit ist. Diesen negativen Aspekt haben in ihren Kritiken der Moderne nachmoderne Autoren wie Foucault, Baudrillard, Lyotard oder Vattimo so stark hervortreten lassen, daß der Eindruck entstand, das individuelle Subjekt sei ein Anachronismus und auch in philosophischen Diskursen zum Verschwinden veruruteilt. Dennoch sind die postmodernen Theorien des *subiectum* als eines Unterworfenen oder Zerfallenden, wie sich gezeigt hat und noch zeigen wird, keineswegs als Exzesse des Denkens zu bagatellisieren" (2000, 88-89).

subjectivity is something firm and immovable, the realization after Postmodernism[23] boils down to the fact that this idea cannot be simply discharged and its content transferred to the external levers of power. Opposites cannot be discarded. In the end, even the deconstructivists themselves had to admit that there has to be a *nucleus* on which to base the consequent scholarship. Thus, poststructuralist scholarship taken to the extreme caused the utter *sacrificium intellectus* that backfired at the theorists themselves. Therefore, there exists a need for the cautious recall of the concept from the pre-deconstructive phase and for new attempts at carefully updating its definition.

4.2 New subject(ivity)

The subject may, obviously, return to the circle of philosophical concepts without feeling awkward. It is imperative to note that the new subjectivity does not return to the pre-deconstructive period but combines the "best of both worlds" in order to receive a viable fundament. This was possible only through the acquiring of a certain degree of cognitive humility that could resemble the famous Socratic maxim very well on both sides, the idealist as well as the nihilist. Hence, even though there may be no absolutes, this is no reason for the lack of determined, vital, and theoretically firmly-grounded concepts.

The criticisms aimed at Poststructuralism revealed certain inconsistencies in their conceptualizations, thus turning attention away from the "death of character" towards searching, yet again, for a different and sensible solution. What one can argue today is that no matter how atomized the ontological structure of subjectivity may be, no matter how strong the factual external influences are, the core of the subjective individual cannot be dissolved and made simply to cease to exist. One should recall here the rebuffing, radically anti-subjectivist quotation by Guzzoni.[24] At the same time, deconstruction has brought to the surface the importance of the multiple relations in which human beings are

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[23] Cf. Badiou's quotation on p. 130.
[24] Cf. p. 122.

entangled. With that, our character is clearly altered but not dead or non-existent. With this important insight, scholarship returned to the vicinity of the pre-deconstructive point of view, that is traditional metaphysics. This is shown, for example, in Williams's opinion that "if the words matter, the meanings will matter, and to ignore them formally is usually to accept some of them informally" (1966, 61). Thus, it is absolutely not the case of negating the intellectual accomplishments of Poststructuralism and, at the same time, re-embracing the ideals of the traditional metaphysics but, rather, putting both theoretical views and their accomplishments in a perspective of mutual complementation.

The questions about the essence of the subject are raised once again in current scholarship, though from a significantly modified perspective. While subjectivity was previously understood as the immovable and absolute quality that modernist currents worked hard to undermine, it now started to linger in the shadow of a rather "deadly" experience, which makes it much less conceited and self-conscious.[25] The new subjectivity has lost all its idealist self-conscious posture. It is, therefore, in fundamental accord with the new trend to turn back to the position of modern subject where it has been left waiting prior to embarking on the deconstructivist quest. Among the first theoretical endeavours that come to mind is the Critical Theory of Adorno and Horkheimer. Although their views, in Zima's words, revealed "ihre Solidarität mit der Metaphysik "im Augenblick ihres Sturzes"" (2000, 87),[26] they still could see the benefits of the liberation from underneath it. Because when Adorno was developing what Szondi calls his "Dialektik der Individuation" (1969, 105), he wrote in *Minima moralia* that "so real das Individuum in seiner Beziehung zu anderen sein mag, es ist, als Absolutes betrachtet, eine bloße Abstaktion" (1984, 283). Furthermore, Adorno insists that the "I" "wird um so reicher, je freier es sich entfaltet und sie zurückspiegelt, während seine

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[25] The gist of the turn is well described by Goldmann who uses the example of the tragic character in order to portray and concur with the postmodern perspective. Thus he avers that "if the fundamental characteristic of tragic man is his demand for absolute truth, then this involves consequences [...] [which] concern the problem of certainty. This is, it is true, primarily a theoretical concept; yet any purely theoretical certainty runs the risk of being shown to be illusory, and any piece of abstract reasoning may, when judged by the light of experience, reveal flaws not noticed by the abstract thinker" (71). Although his opposition to the "purely theoretical" conceptualization is obviously neo-marxist, poststructuralist thinkers only made good on the modernist (not necessarily ideological) distrust of metaphysical certainty. Needless to say, the result has been quite similar.

Abgrenzung und Verhärtung, die es als Ursprung reklamiert, eben damit es beschränkt, verarmen läßt und reduziert" (1984, 291). At that point, the openness of subjectivity has still been perceived as something liberating and, therefore, necessarily positive. Adorno saw it rightly as a reaction to the disempowering of the individual subject. Yet after the arrival of the total freedom through deconstruction, the subject was nowhere to be found. The position of the subject was historical. As Bürger explains, "der im Prinzip der Konstruktion gelegene Verzicht auf subjektive Imagination zugunsten seines Sich-dem-Zufall-der-Konstruktion-Überlassens wird von Adorno geschichtphilosophisch als Reaktion auf die Entmächtigung des bürgerlichen Individuums erklärt" (91).

It is quite significant that even the "great priest" of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida, in an interview with Jean-Luc Nancy, distances himself and other essential French philosophers of the eighties from the common charge of having eliminated the subject. He adamantly maintains that "if over the last twenty-five years in France the most notorious of these strategies have in fact led to a kind of discussion around "the question of the subject," none of them has sought to "liquidate" anything" (96). He continues by saying that "for these three discourses (Lacan, Althusser, Foucault) and for some of the thinkers they privilege (Freud, Marx, Nietzsche), the subject can be re-interpreted, restored, re-inscribed, it certainly isn't "liquidated"" (97).[27] What this amounts to is not only the denial of the criticism of Poststructuralism. Moreover, Derrida places himself and his colleagues into the chain of western European thought, thus negating the extreme exclusivist position taken up by scores of their followers.

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[26] The inlaid quotation is borrowed from Adorno's *Negative Dialektik*, 398, footnote 83.

[27] Although Derrida strongly defends also Althusser, Lacan ("Did Lacan "liquidate" the subject? No," 97) together with Foucault ("In his case, we would appear to have a history of subjectivity that, in spite of certain massive declarations about the effacement of the figure of man, certainly never consisted in "liquidating" the Subject," ibid.), it is hard not to see through the veil that he wants to uncover. Even though he insists that "the ontological question that deals with the *subjectum*, in its Cartesian and post-Cartesian forms, is anything but a liquidation" (ibid.), the gist of his deconstruction lies in rejecting precisely this kind of *subiectum*. He may be discussing the ontology but only *modo negativo*, as a dismissal and denunciation. Given these facts, Derrida's declaration rings, unfortunately, hollow.

Nevertheless, a fundamental poststructuralist elation at tearing down the existing system is hard to be denied.[28]

Yet Derrida, although fending off the criticism aimed at himself personally and Poststructuralism in general, does not relent. He keeps defending the new, highly critical approach of denial. His *noblesse de robe* (that of the foremost deconstructionist) prevents him from admitting the need for a significant, in fact, fundamental change of his own critique. The problem of subjectivity today, as he sees it, is in its immovable relation between the signified and the signifier, namely "it is therefore a certain closing off – the saturating or suturing – of identity to self, and a structure still too narrowly fit to self-identification, that today gives the concept of subject its dogmatic effect" (1991, 108). The concept of subject, through its long speculative philosophical tradition and in its climax in Idealism, in Derrida's opinion, has concentrated around a number of static positivist qualities that cannot be separated from it, "around being present (*étant-présent*), presence to self – which implies therefore a certain interpretation of temporality: identity to self, positionality, property, personality, ego, consciousness, will, intentionality, freedom, humanity, etc" (1991, 109), not to mention, of course, responsibility to the self prior to the responsibility to the other.

How, then, is such a divergent stance to be understood? Again, Derrida's view aims at the median of both stances. Although he does not cave in and openly admits the ultimate malfunction of deconstruction he, at the same time, no longer seeks to contest the need, at least partially, for the return of a firmer and more concrete concept of subjectivity into the critical discourse. He chooses the middle road, uses the benefits of the relativistic viewpoint introduced by poststructuralist theories and applies them to the traditional positivistic concepts. What he ends up with is that the "dislocation of the absolute subject from the other and from time neither comes about, nor leads *beyond* phenomenology, but, rather, if not in it, then at least on its border, on the very line of its possibility" (1991, 102). The heritage of deconstruction will always remain in the critical,

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[28] It is here that Jean-Luc Nancy also perceives a certain degree of discrepancy. ""To deconstruct," here, comes down to showing this distance at the very heart of presence, and, in so doing, prevents us from simply separating an outdated "metaphysics of the subject" from another thinking that would be,

relativistic perspective, one that warns that any and all philosophical concepts "cannot be reduced to a homogeneity" (1991, 104-105). In fact, the nature of this critique is supported by the gist of philosophical thought in general where the homogeneity has usually been seen as a danger to the multitude of possible views. At present, it seems there may be no question of a complete return to the absolute pre-deconstructive subjectivity. Derrida suggests combining both extremes in a new perception, such that would allow us to comprehend the subject as "the finite experience of nonidentity to self, as the underivable interpellation inasmuch it comes from the other, from the trace of the other, with all the paradoxes or the aporia of being-before-the-law etc." (1991, 103-104). Post-deconstructive subjectivity appears thus only capable of consisting of a linking together such immergeable views on the subject as complete self-identity and total "non-subjectifiable," "non-identifiable" (1991, 110) realms, an amalgamation of contradictions (cf. Sartrean "non-vérité'), the only one capable of more fully reflecting the nature of the subject. Therefore, it is possible, along with Critchley, to maintain that the new subject "is still a subject and ergo a metaphysical fundament, even if it is an unknowable, ungraspable fundament" (1996, 18).

For the full understanding of this turn by way of checking on its preconditions we have to return to Sartre. In his writing on Kierkegaard he was well aware that we as humans do not have the luxury to choose the final reach of our own epistemological enterprises. Their range is simply limited to (and by) our own experiential as well as intellectual capabilities. These, in turn, are again limited with regard to the phenomenology of the world and all the rest lies in the field of philosophical, religious and other speculations. Our quest for absolutes thus necessarily reaches the border separating the "here" from "there" and does not let us pass through. The only instance that we can truly be aware of, as we have been shown by Poststructuralism and deconstruction, is our one concrete possibility that has been bestowed upon us. All the rest is an intellectual play, a theoretical induction. With the criticism of the epistemology of deconstruction an important degree of hermeneutic humility has been introduced as

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altogether, elsewhere. However, *something has happened*, there has been a *history* both of thinking of the subject and of its deconstruction" (1991, 102-103).

well. Humility that echoes the Cartesian basis of doubt, the *ego*, the absolute, which has turned into the possibility, that is one of absolute's manifold forms. If, previously, for the idealist philosophers the contingency that has come to being had simply been a Platonic "reflection on the cave-wall" and thus a fake ideal whereas they roamed the higher spheres of the "true" ideals, we have now become aware that it may be only one of the multiple glimmers of the ideal but it undeniably *is one*. Jean-Luc Nancy made much later a statement quite in this Sartrian vein. He combs through the philosophical history of the last two centuries and comes up with a very similar, if not identical, conclusion. Again, a lengthier quotation must be introduced:

> The becoming-world of world means that "world" is no longer an object, nor an idea, but the place existence is given and exposed to. This first happened in philosophy, and to philosophy, with the Kantian revolution and the "condition of possible experience": world as possibility of (or for) an existent being, possibility as world for such a being. Or: Being no longer to be thought of as an essence, but to be given, offered to a world as to its own possibility. [...] The history of philosophy since Kant [...] is the history of the various breaks out of which emerges, out of the "possible worlds" (the "Anschauungen"), as well as out of a simple necessity of the world (another kind of "Anschauung"), *the world as possibility*, or the world as chance for existence (1991, 1).

In this perspective, the deconstructivist approach appears to be only a very extreme, if not violent, reaction to the former ideals maintained in a quite exclusivist manner. Thus, contrary to the preceding thoughts that obliterated the contingency of the moment, contrary also to the following ideas, which enthroned it as the only possible instance, theorists realized in the aftermath of these stances that the path they should tread in the understanding of both the world and the subject leads between both mentioned extremes. It comes as a small surprise that Zima puts down, in fact, a programmatic statement of the new subjectivity, namley "daß das individuelle Subjekt beides zugleich ist und als Einheit der Gegensätze noch am ehesten konkret verstanden wird: als autonome, productive *und* als unterworfene, zerfallende Instanz" (2000, 87).

Dialogical Bearing

Technically, the process of returning to the subject its previous position can no longer be completed through the idealist dialectics. Contrary, rather, to this dialectical cognitive mode preferred by Hegelians, the new approach chose the dialogical method. The crucial characteristic of the dialectics, namely the synthesis, now appeared to be less desiralbe if not entirely obsolete. Since the synthesis was beyond reach, the only production of meaning of the concept became a binary one, in a pendular movement between the two extremes. Thus, I show in this sub-section, the new subjectivity is distinguished by the constant changing between static and dynamic. In other words, by a constant motion between the identity of the notion of the self and that of the other.

After the postmodern negation of any and all universal values has been unmasked and its partial, if not even very limited, success exposed, neither the older idealist values could be restored nor the newer negative, self-imploding ones accepted. Although different suggestions have been put forward, the majority of scholars seem to prefer the middle ground. Such a decision rests, of course, on a conviction that the past cannot be denied nor can the accomplishments of its poststructuralist critique be discarded. This may be accomplished both on the level of the form as well as that of the content. While the content will be discussed at a later stage, I shall concentrate here on the form. With regard to the recently propagated ideas, the concepts that are being reintroduced should under no circumstances be static and immovable.

Interestingly, it is here that both planes, the historical and the critical, meet. Hegel's extreme idealist position has professed the dynamic movement of the dialectical process in which one position enters into conflict with its opposition and through the clash between the two and consequent necessary defeat of one of them, the conflictual situation returns to its primeval state. In Hegel's system, the third stage, that is the synthesis, is always possible. This may even be an understatement: for Hegel the *Aufhebung* is the *succus* of the entire process.

Modernism, for example, went in the opposite direction. It isolated the subject, rescued it from the compulsory being part of the system, yet, at the same time, eliminated any other external relationship. It is in this sense that Zima hails Bürger's insightful

realization about the "monologic" (2000, 84) nature of modernist subjectivity. Bürger discusses the subject by stating that "die wichtigste Begrenzung, die das Feld vornimmt, dürfte darin bestehen, daß es das Subjekt als eins bestimmt. Zwar lebt es in der Welt, geht Beziehungen zu andern ein, aber als Subjekt ist es einzelnes Ich. Das Du ist für seine Selbstbestimmung ohne Bedeutung" (1998, 222). Modernism rests on solipsism.

Obviously, the return to any of these positions is impossible, hence the decision to take the best of both worlds and, at all times, maintain a dynamic connection. That can be accomplished not through the dialectical but through the dialogical protocol. The new path does not appear to be only a two-stage dialectic, that is a process without a reconciliatory resolution to the conflict and the conclusion in a synthesis, but, rather, a constant process in motion between the individual and the external subject. Although it is true that conflictual dissonances have existed since the formation of social structures and tragedy has been the essential artistic vehicle for them, in the course of time these conflicts and their resolutions have been placed in service of different social, religious, and political practices.[29] Thus, the form of these resolutions has altered. With the revival of dynamic relations, the dialogue as *modus operandi* has wrested itself from hegemonic forces (such as, for example, Hegelian substantiality) to reach its theoretical independence. In the dialogical relation the meaning is not to be solidified anywhere because it is in constant flux between the two poles in a ceaseless process of establishing, falling apart and then reestablishing itself anew on the same plane without ever reaching the "third stage" of synthesis. This premise entails a different one: the dialogical plane does not require, moreover, is against the final reconciliatory resolution. The phase of synthesis has to be left out because it would mean the employment of the poles in support of some speculative ideal. This new approach underscores the non-developmental and, in this sense, the permanently dynamic relationship within the individual subjectivity. "Idea" is no longer accepted as a cover for all the conditionalities of life. In fact, reality has been perceived as being constrained by the foregoing idea. Which concept could be

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[29] The poststructuralist realization has been well presented by Critchley averring the following, namely "the subject can no longer support itself autarkically; it is, rather, overflowed or dependent upon prior structures (linguistic, ontological, socioeconomic, unconscious, or whatever) outside of its conscious control" (1996, 34).

more charged than the subject? Probably very few. Thus, *in lieu* of the "idea" of the subject theorists revelled in its real-life experience. They could wish little more since, as Cascardi puts it, the "subjective experience is itself the conflictive "totality" (3).

The new subject has emerged as a contingent construct consisting of both the static and dynamic poles. Its self-realization rests in a ceaseless consolidation and constant verification of both points. This active process has the subject subsume a double role: the subject and its own object. The practice of verification can keep proceeding only under the condition that the subjectivity becomes its own subject-matter (that is the object) of analysis while, at the same time, remaining the subject doing this analysis. The subject cannot realize the fact of its own objectification, which is very much in reverence to the poststructuralist intervention, unless it realizes it itself. No external instance can define subjectivity, since that would put it in a position of a demiurge, the absolute subject. It is, therefore, the subject itself that has to carry out its own analysis. That is exactly the instance that Manfred Frank calls "die Reflexivität" that, for him, is also the "Grundvoraussetzung für Subjektkonstitution" (Frank 1987, 10). Thus the subject is brought to bear upon itself, which, in the last instance, is the true process of self-realization.[30] There is no other realization but the one brought about by the realizing instance. Given this self-realization, the subject has obviously lost the monadic character it had been granted in Idealism, because the part of the subject that is being analyzed has to be foreign to it as the analyzing self. Yet as soon as the process of examination is complete, this part may be introduced into the awareness of the self. What it means is that the subject has to be totally, unquestionably familiar to itself and, at the same time, also fully foreign. The concept has to be itself and simultaneously somebody other. The new conception of the subject sees it as both itself and the other. Zima, for example, argues that "dieser Prozeß der Identitätssuche hat deshalb dialogischen Charakter, weil er stets auf den Anderen und das Andere ausgerichtet ist" (2000, xii). Yet this "other" is still the same analyzing self. The subject's dialogical self-cognizant practice cannot halt within the limits of subjectivity. The same dynamic binary movement should serve as the hermeneutic tool in experiencing the other. Therefore it has become clear that "ein

individuelles Subjekt nur im Kommunikationszusammenhang zu verstehen ist, in dem es anderen Subjekten dialogisch-polemisch begegnet" (ibid. 11).

Nonetheless, this relationship is not a simple one for the subject him/herself. He/she has to balance on the rope of self-awareness above the yawning chasm of comfortable absolute solipsism on the one hand and self-deconstruction on the other. If the subject abandoned the constant movement of self-verification within and without, one of the sides would instantaneously suck him/her into one of the extremes and, consequently, cause its disintegration as the finally centered and "well-tempered" subjectivity. In other words, what establishes the new subjectivity, what makes it exist in this post-deconstructive agreement of opposites can, quite quickly, prove fatal for that subjectivity. The position of the new subject is exactly what Zima describes as "alterity." Namely, on the one hand it is necessary for the subject to see him/herself as such in order to conduct the analysis, yet very easily this can lead into the amorphousness of objectivity. For Zima, "das individuelle Subjekt erscheint nun als dialogische, offene Einheit, die einerseits von der Alterität lebt, andererseits aber von ihr bedroht wird" (2000, 376).

Emmanuel Lévinas

One of the most instrumental theoretical minds in breaking the new ground for the concept of subject was Emmanuel Lévinas. For him, as previously for Sartre, the key instance of self-autonomy became the idea of truth. The truth of the self as a universal concept could, as I have mentioned previously, become the fundament for self-constitution. Lévinas, too, chose the middle path between traditional and poststructuralist theories that can be best demonstrated with his choice of the infinity over totality. Infinity, as I demonstrate in this sub-section, bears all the necessary qualities to support the modern subjectivity. It is relational, that is binary, dynamic, and open-ended. The new subjectivity, as Lévinas sees it, does not belong to the realm of ontology but, by a

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[30] Here, the link to the Romantic philosophy of Fichte and Schelling is obvious.

therefore, to part of the scheme. Yet – and here Sartre's or, better, Kierkegaard's *tour de force* comes into relief – every single embodiment of the ideal means not the Platonic fulfillment of the ideal but, rather, "l'erreur qu'il est au départ comme détermination tronquée" (ibid.), which Kierkegaard calls the "non-vérité" (ibid.). In the case of a concrete life, that is of the factual reality, Kierkegaard is aware, it is this "non-vérité," which is lived, not the absolute faculty. Thus, Sartre writes "la non-vérité est *à vivre*, elle appartient donc aussi à la subjectivité subjective" (ibid.).[21] The concept of "non-vérité," let me reiterate, refers to and undermines the Hegelian notion of the absolute truth that is the radical essential ingredient of Idealism. Since Kierkegaard, and after him among others also Sartre, Badiou, and Henrich, realized that existence is inevitably a subjective and individual matter, it has no other way than to stray away from that absolute and take thus its own path, the path of "non-truth." By severing the contingent ties with the absolute and establishing the factual ones with the concrete lived reality, this truth of existence becomes once again complete, even "absolute," yet, this time differently, only for the individual subject. If the subject is to think of him/herself as such, than it has to be individually absolute. There is namely no space in any individual for questions such as "do I really exist?" and "what if I am not?" etc. Kierkegaard's and, consequently, Sartre's conclusion is that the "partial" truth of one-self is in fact absolute for that concrete self. It does not reach towards the others, it is uniquely self-referential. It is on this basis that Sartre can continue that "ma non-vérité découverte devient, au moins dans l'immediat, ma vérité. Ainsi la vérité subjective existe. Elle n'est pa *savoir*, mais auto-détermination; on ne la définira ni comme un rapport extrinsèque de la connaissance à l'être ni comme la marque interne d'une adéquation ni comme l'indissoluble unité d'un système" (ibid.).

It is almost impossible to stress sufficiently the importance of this shift of the absolute in its form of "subjective truth" as being founded in subjectivity alone. As post-Hegelian philosophy has maintained, subjectivity and the absolute, the contingent and the unconditional, meet precisely within the frame of the individual subject. Subjectivity is thus the place where both concepts are not hampered but, to the contrary, underscored.

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21 To emphasize his point, Sartre brings up Kierkegaard's quote, namely "ma propre non-vérité je ne peux la découvrir que seul, elle n'est découverte en effet que quand c'est moi qui la découvre; avant

answer [which] is precisely what is required to show the necessity of understanding the moral content of tragic poetry, not as its last word, but as one aspect of its integral truth: that is to say in terms of the history of philosophy" (1977, 105).

The post-rational critique has rejected the primacy of philosophy as the foremost hermeneutical tool for art.[32] Instead, social, political, psychological tools have been introduced, thus meeting the critique of Lévinas who chooses to return to the concept of truth – not to its pre-deconstructive stage but to the instance of the self-realization and self-constitution. He is well aware that only on the basis of the postmodern radical conclusions did it become possible to realize that "the defection from presence [simulacrum] led up to the defection from the true, to significations which do not have to comply with the summation of Knowledge" (1991, 5) or, for that matter, with renditions of reality. Because the entire reality cannot be subsumed under the concept of play, game, simulacrum, pastiche, or palimpsest. Better still, by virtue of Postmodernism we were forced to realize, in addition to the previous claims about the absoluteness of the world and human beings, as well as their playful and contingent nature. Knowledge is thus not fixed and absolute, therefore also a limited quality but, contrarily, a rather conditional and ever-growing collection of experiences. For Lévinas, there has been no particular shift in the comprehension of the above concepts. In his opinion, every new approach dwells on the previous ones, be it as their radicalization or their critique. In this sense, Lévinas does not reject the theories of Poststructuralism up front and, in fact, includes their findings in his own theory, because "what remains constructed after the deconstruction is, certainly, the stern architecture of the deconstructing discourse" (1991, 5). Where there is a continuation, there also has to be acceptance and understanding.

Lévinas overcomes the poststructuralist vision of the world and its elements by a small yet significant twist. Anti-Humanism refused to accept any firm values on the basis of the claim that all are based on the immanent idea of totality. Since this is an idealistic concept seen as unrelatable to the concrete reality, it had to be removed. However Lévinas raises in a *coup de force* a different idea in opposition to totality, namely infinity.

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[32] Philosophy has been, let us remember, given the unheard pride of place in Hegel's theory, especially with regard to the idea of the "end of art".

It may sound as a mere philosophical sleight of hand yet the difference is elemental. Totality as such is thought to comprise everything but it is defined on the other hand by the seeming "border" that makes it what it is: a totality. Totality is complete because it comprises all elements from within as well as those from without. This means that there are also other realms, the fact that they are, in the case of totality, non-existent notwithstanding. It is exactly the nature of totality that enables their existence. Without these imagined subliminal delimiters, this concept would not be what it stands for, that is all-inclusive. The gist of it lies in being defined as a realm with possible yet non-existent limits, in other words, in its being different from everything else but still comprising everything. Outside the totality, by definition, nothing remains. Yet this nothingness is still thought of as a positive category, a pure contingency. Contrary to this one, a truly open-ended and completely "free" and limitless concept is the one suggested by Lévinas, that of infinity. Instead of being "total," that is "comprising the *in*" while "excluding the *out*," it simply does not bear any restriction whatsoever and is, therefore, conceptually – not pragmatically – more complete than the former. By that simple fact, the infinity appears to be not only more-inclusive but also more true than totality.

Lévinas's work is based on the reintroduction of the *rigor mentis* into the speculative thinking as well as the rehabilitation of essential philosophical concepts. This is why Lévinas, in what may echo Kierkegaardian ruminations, claims that infinity is the one that conditions "toute vérité objective" (1965, xiii), which means that it presents a step further than the principally limited totality. It also means that totality is conditioned by infinity. Infinity is also less concrete than totality, it is complete, absolute, "plus objectif que l'objectivité" (ibid., xiv), yet open-ended and limitless at the same time. This is the characteristic that makes it the perfect foundation for the post-deconstructive world and its concepts. Thus, infinity becomes the platform for understanding, a renewed development of previously rejected ideas. Infinity is not only a hermeneutical tool, an epistemological crutch, but much more, since "l'idée de l'infini est le mode d'être" (ibid., xv). It has been given the positive connotation of the totality without actually limiting it to a potentially finite content.

Now, this essential change of paradigm is additionally reflected with regard to subjectivity. In Lévinas's theory the cognition of infinity has been granted only to the

subjectivity because "l'infini se produit dans la relation du Même avec l'Autre" (ibid., xiv). Infinity, as Lévinas conceives it, cannot rest on passively defined static concepts such as totality. It is, conversely, fundamentally dynamic, relational. It appears solely in a relation, in a situation where an entity is perceived as itself and its own exteriority at the same time, namely, "l'être est l'extériorité et l'extériorité se produit dans sa vérité, dans un champ subjectif" (ibid., 275). His major work, *Totalité et infini*, has been intended as a defense of subjectivity thought in an entirely new conception of one's own self that is positioned, better still, defined through the relational openness towards itself in the function of the other. By being also the other, subjectivity may gain the necessary condition for realization of itself. It is in this way that Lévinas thought of "la subjectivité comme acueillant Autrui, comme hospitalité" (ibid., xv). His essential novelty lies in the fact that although subjectivity is considered only through the other, it is through this open-ended dynamic relation that it may come to its realization of the full self.

Linking subjectivity, previously considered to have been the only securely limited and, for this reason, cognizable sphere, with infinity and, in fact, founding it on an open all-inclusiveness, enables the subject to overcome the main obstacle raised by anti-humanist thought, namely the claim "that the subject can no longer support itself autarkically" (Critchley 1996, 34) but is "dependent upon prior structures (linguistic, ontological, socioeconomic, unconscious, or whatever) outside of its conscious control" (ibid.). Moreover, Critchley claims, even if all these relations were true, and, for that matter, it should be, once again, acknowledged that Poststructuralism did point out a number of seminal issues, "*we do not need this knowledge when we enter into relation with the other*" (1996, 37). The force that drives human beings in the process of their self-constitution occurs on the transcendental level as a "metaphysical desire" that is never to be satisfied. The movement between subjectivity and its self as the other is therefore constant and continuous. Any other way would mean falling back into either the absolute or the deconstructive realities. If such a volatile self-realization has not been acceptable to the pre-deconstructionist theory, and if Poststructuralism denied even the last bits of a firm notion of the self, Lévinas's suggested resolution avoids extremes by taking the middle path. It is neither absolutely static nor non-existent. It is an entity consisting of incessant movement that, on the other hand, puts subjectivity in a very awkward position.

It always has to stay alert and to maintain the balance between both extreme positions, the static and the dynamic ones.

Yet, according to Lévinas, it is precisely this position that constitutes subjectivity. The only existential entity capable of sustaining the concept of alterity and identity in itself at the same time, is human being. Namely, the otherness is possible only with regard to something that remains the same. Since this sameness cannot be total but, rather, infinite, it cannot ingrain itself within its own safe concept of its own totality. It has to occupy a new position "on the verge" of the two realms, the absolute and the relative, and to ensure equal conditions for the self-realization from both. The full heterogeneity can be perceived as such only when confronted with the full homogeneity. And the full-fledged homogeneity is, in Lévinas's theory, only that of myself. It is only my own "I" that is capable of keeping the relation open without loosing sight of my own self, through the extraction of this notion from the relation with myself as the other. In the philosopher's words, "l'altérité, l'hétérogénéité radicale de l'Autre, n'est possible que si l'Autre est autre par rapport à un terme dont l'essence est de demeurer au point de départ, de servir d'*entrée* dans la relation, d'être le Même non pas relativement, mais absolument. *Un terme ne peut demeurer absolument au point de départ de la relation que comme Moi*" (1965, 6). This condition maintains my recognized self on the brink of becoming the other, that is in the situation of constant danger of self-annihilation in objectivity. Yet this is precisely *la condition humaine*, this is the price we have to pay for our own comprehension of ourselves as subjects. Namely, Lévinas maintains, "être homme, c'est savoir qu'il en est ainsi. La liberté consiste à savoir que la liberté est en péril" (1965, 5). Because, as he elsewhere writes, "cette liberté enveloppée dans une responsabilité qu'elle n'arrive pas à endosser – est la façon de la créature, da la passivité illimitée du Soi, de l'incondition du Soi" (1974, 140, footnote 13). Critchley underscores this stance by putting it in the perspective of the traditional philosophical concepts, namely, "it is still a subject and ergo a metaphysical fundament, even if it is an unknowable, ungraspable fundament" (18).

What this means is that the new subjectivity is, therefore, taken out of the realm of ontology where it had been placed by traditional philosophical thought and moved, because of the activeness of the subject's essence, to the platform of deontology. The

mentioned obligation towards the self as the other opens up a different sphere for the subject to constitute itself in, namely that of ethics. If ontology comprised the space of fundamental consciousness, then ethics, in Lévinas's understanding, moves it into the area of higher reflectiveness, because "the ethical subject is a sensible subject, not a conscious subject" (Critchley 30). The fundamental, static notion of the self-identity is denied to the subject because its consciousness is removed. Lévinas avers that "subjectivity is not the ego, but me" (1987, 150).[33] It is not my own being that knows of myself as Me, but it is me-being-myself. The new, post-deconstructive subjectivity is thus a deontological entity, governed by the rules of ethics. Thus ethics, as Critchley insightfully explains, "is not an obligation toward the other mediated through the formal and procedural universalization of maxims or some appeal to good conscience, rather – and this is what is truly provocative about Lévinas – ethics is *lived* in the sensibility of a corporeal obligation to the other" (30).

In order to obtain a more complete perspective and to fully evaluate Lévinas's contribution, I suggest returning to the period of German Idealism and the philosopher of absolute subjectivism, J. G. Fichte. It is in his philosophy that, for the first time appears the non-wholly-identical sameness of the subject and his/her activity. Fichte already divulges the seminal notion of the conception of the "I" [*Ich*], only and exclusively as a concept "in motion." In other words, the personal pronoun "I" does not exist because it simply does not have the real-life component. Conversely, Fichte grants the existence, through the suiting form of the verb "to be," only to the entity "I am." By doing that he, in the first place, disposes of the question about the hub of the essence of the "I," that is of either individual, or subject etc., and secondly, irrevocably links the ontological plane to that of the existence. To reveal this particularly weighty and, within Idealism, bravely novel theoretical position, a lengthier quotation is in place:

> Das Ich *setzt sich selbst*, und *es ist*, vermöge dieses blossen Setzens durch sich selbst; und umgekehrt: das Ich *ist*, und es *setzt* sein Seyn, vermöge seines blossen Seyns. – Es ist zugleich das Handelnde, und das Product der

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[33] For a clearer understanding I should provide the original version of this statement, namely "la subjectivité n'est pas le Moi, mais moi" (Critchley 32).

> Handlung; das Thätige, und das, was durch die Thätigkeit hervorgebracht wird; Handlung und That sind Eins und ebendasselbe; und daher ist das: *Ich bin*, Ausdruck einer Thathandlung; aber auch der einzig-möglichen, wie sich aus der ganzen Wissenschaftlehre ergeben muss (96).

What is very obvious is that Fichte's presumption is basically a tautology "I am = I am."[34] This is confirmed in his stance that "alles was ist, ist nur insofern, als es im Ich gesetzt ist, und ausser dem Ich ist nichts" (99). Interestingly, once Fichte's concept of the "I" has been consolidated on the deontological level, he returns to the subject's ontologically conceived essence and takes a step back under the auspices of the statically conceived values of the Hegelian dialectical system. Fichte's tautological definition asserts the dialectical oneness of both concepts. This is exactly what Zima spotted in Fichte's reductionist stance, namely that "dieser Text enthält nicht nur das idealistische Glaubensbekenntnis zum Subjekt als dem Zugrundeliegenden, sondern auch eine Negation der Eigenständigkeit des Objekts als Alterität" (2000, 103).

As has become clear in the case of Lévinas, Fichte's ideas of the interweaving of essence and existence of subject have proved extremely useful in the contemporary shaping of a modern dramatic subjectivity.[35] It is on this basis, we can maintain, that while Fichte's initially fresh look upon the subjectivity ended up offering, unsurprisingly, a rather static understanding of the concept, Lévinas, per force, had to couple it with its active, open side. If we wanted to return to Fichte's tautological definition of the rapport we would have to write it, therefore, slightly differently, perhaps in a more compelling as well as committed fashion, namely, "I = am." The deontological, hence also the ethical ingredients are obvious.

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34 Here, Michel Henry, although writing a scathing critique of the concept of subject, offers an interesting insight that "these two terms, "subject" and "representation", are tautological," because "the subject is the being re-presented as such, the fact of being represented" (159). Also, as Critchley puts it, the "phenomenology is an egology" (16), while in Henry's wording, "the representation is the essence of phenomenality" (159). Thus, the existence of "I" is a representation of the self. The being, in form of representation, is the essence of existence.

35 As it has been confirmed by Langer "that creating the characters is not something apart from building the plot, but is an integral portion of it" (352). Moreover, any contemporary struggle of an individual subject (of the "I" who, despite all his/her doubts and identity crises, still can utter the descriptor "I'), in order to survive as such, to keep his/her individual dignity and not dissolve in a gregaristic

However, in the discussion of tragedy, ethics proves to be more problematic than it appears. Nietzsche already claimed that the ancient tragic heroes have been primarily aesthetic and not ethical and that it was precisely the ethical imperative of consciousness that seemingly destroyed tragedy. This train of thought has underpinned many subsequent arguments about the Attic tragedy. Ethics has been perceived as standing in the way of pure aesthetic satisfaction derived from savouring the art. This has been also Lukács's view because, he thought, "die Ethik (das an Kant erstärkte 18. Jahrhundert) stand dem rein ästhetischen Schicksalsgedanken im Wege. Der tragische Konflikt verliert an Intensität, denn die Kraft und Bedeutung dessen, was dem tragischen Menschen gegenübersteht, muß verringert werden, womit zugleich auch das wahre Pathos des Menschen vermindert wird" (1981, 159). Along his theoretical lines, Postmodernism attempted to give subjectivity a similar spin in terms of pure (aesthetic) game, play, simulacrum, in short, non-reality. Now, with the possibility formulated by Lévinas, the subject received back its foundation, which, by being diametrically opposed to the concept of aesthetic entertainment, reinstated the lost capacity of self-constitution, self-realization, of course, through the other. Lévinas confirms this by saying that "moral consciousness is not an experience of values, but an access to external being: external being is, *par excellence*, the Other" (1990, 293).

With Lévinas, ethics became capable of offering a different, more compelling perception. It did not simply replace ontology by taking over the function of the *protè sophia*. This shift came about through a new understanding of the essence. Instead of static, from the outset all-encompassing and therefore absolute, this essence turned out to be no less absolute by being dynamic and "non-exclusive." Critchley and Dews, in their jointly written introduction, elucidate this new relation by stating that for Lévinas "ethics is not an obligation at the level of consciousness, where my responsibility to the other is mediated through rationality, the universalization of maxims, good conscience, or some formal-procedural conception of justice; rather, ethics is *lived* in the sensibility and corporeality of a relation to alterity" (9). Therefore, the static deductive Cartesian "ego

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"normality" (cf. Ronald Laing, 55) of masses does, in fact, fulfill all the manifold preconditions to be called tragic.

cogito, ergo ego sum" has been replaced with the inductive open-ended "me voici!," which has been endowed with the same significance.[36] Also, with the grammatical form of general existence, the "il y a," it rightfully reminds us of the Heideggerian state of being-thrown into the openness-of-being.[37]

Since ethical subjectivity can arrive at a self-constitution only through the relation with the other, its position is contradictory at best, for its realization of identity depends on its realization of non-identity. This non-identity has to be, therefore, irreducible. The constant interchange of the two states cannot, obviously, happen on the spiral as suggested by Hegel's dialectics. It can exist only by way of maintaining a dialogue in its role as a mediator between the static and the dynamic comprehension of the subject. In this sense, Lévinas only flirts with both the pre-deconstructive idea of subjectivity as well as the anti-humanist, post-rational discoveries. It is Critchley, again, who puts this issue in a rather persuasive perspective: "the subjectivity of the subject is a passivity that cannot be grasped or comprehended, that is beyond essence, otherwise than Being. [...] *The identity of the subject is denied to consciousness, or to reflection, and is structured intersubjectively.* [...] Who is the subject? It is *me* and nobody else" (32).

With this final resolution, the return of the post-antihumanist "I" is self-evident. It is placed in the hub of contemporary society that extends into art, too, because "the question of the possibility of tragedy is the question of meaning and essence" (Lukács 1974, 156). The essence has been returned to subjectivity by virtue of the foundation of its core on the dialogical perpetual exchange of its static and dynamic phases, that is its conscious realization of the self as such and as the other at the same time. What Lukács saw as the "paradox of drama and tragedy," namely the questions "how can essence come alive? How can it become the sensual, immediate, the only real, the truly "being" thing? Drama alone creates — "gives form to" — real human beings, but just because of this it must, of necessity, deprive them of living existence" (Lukács 1974, 156), has been thereby successfully overcome. The previously depersonalized and dehumanized subject

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36 This may be translated into English as "here I am", yet it should be underscored that the stress should be on the verb and the adverb of place (be here), and not on the personal pronoun. Critchley, for example, circumvents this problem by translating it as "see me here!" (32).

37 Cf. footnote nr. 19 on page 126.

received back the ground on which to stand in order to claim back his/her position in the world on the basis of "the fact that I am someone when I speak (thereby retrieving the *hacceity* of the subject, its thisness, its uniqueness), a sense of self that might begin to meet the claims of ethical and political responsibility" (Critchley 25). Furthermore, it may be no exaggeration to claim that with ethics as the foundation of contemporary subjectivity, tragedy, because of its immanent intersubjective character, once again moved to the forefront among the artistic renditions of reality.

Tragedy and Subjectivity

The following section concludes the above ruminations about the possibility of the firmness of the concept of subjectivity even after deconstruction. It has been positively established that one cannot deny the existence of the subject, which, in turn, sheds a positive light on subjectivity in tragedy. As it became obvious, the tragic subject does have all the conditions for its full-fledged existence fulfilled. Also, there is no need for parallel genres or for the declaration of the death of the old ones since the contemporary theoretical basis suffices for the establishment of a complete contemporary subjectivity.

Parallel to the realizations in philosophy, in art, too, it became obvious that the only immediate environment the character might ever get to know is nobody else but his/her own self and that in itself would be sufficient to meet his/her needs. Thus, this new post-deconstructivist universalism of the subject necessarily includes a great deal of solipsism, yet the individual experience nonetheless remains general. Put differently, it is precisely because of its individuality, which should not be confounded with its singularity, that the experience may be perceived as universal. The parallel is not to be sought on the plane of singular similarities but, rather, on the level of communal experience. Williams, for example, put it the other way around, namely "the maximum substance that can be given to the plural "we," or to the group-name "man," is the singular loneliness" (1966, 57).

Not only can one trace even today certain elements in individual characters that can be considered at least as a basis for a communal experience but these character-traits

may be worthy of being called tragic. An appropriate illustration of this interconnectedness of the two realms is Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman* since it is doubtlessly considered a tragic play. Thus the connection is proved between the singular and the universal, the particular and the communal experiences. Therefore, universal is the experience of the individual and on this ground the latter fulfills the precondition for possibly becoming tragic. Experience of reality, one's own struggle with life, necessary suffering and, in most cases, defeat occurs solely on the personal, that is the individual level. More significantly, it is my conviction that it always has.[38] Dramatic character is an individual human being and stands for the entire humanity. This duality has been described already by Lukács: "bei Hebbel entsteht die Tragödie (das Leben) aus der ewigen, metaphysischen Dualität des Allgemeinen und des Einzelnen, und jede Erscheinung, die ihm begegnet, nimmt die Form dieser Dualität an" (1981, 210). Fascinatingly similar is also Sartre's description of subjectivity: "l'homme, irrémediable singularité, est l'être par qui l'universel vient au monde [...] Le vécu, nous l'apprenons chez Kierkegaard, ce sont les hasards non signifiants de l'être en tant qu'ils se dépassent vers un sens qu'ils n'avaient pas au départ et que je nommerai l'universel singulier" (1966, 46). Very aptly put, "l'universel singulier" stands for the subject placed in "le vécu," that is in life or world, revealing in this way its binary, subjective and the objective, nature. Also, before announcing its death, even Elinor Fuchs described the "character" as the "word that stands in for the entire human chain of representation and reception that theater links together" (8). And this is the function that no representation will be able to neglect.

Unamuno's quote about the individual as the limit of the universe, in a manner of predicative logic, with regard to the singular judgments, that is those issued by our own self, appears to be quite on the mark. He maintains that the "singular judgments have the value of universal judgments, the logicians say. *The singular is not particular, it is*

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[38] Cf. related footnote nr. 20 on page 23. There I portray ancient characters as humans in the first place, whereas the consideration of their ideals, for maintaining of which they had been greatly hailed, follows in second place.

universal" (11, emphasis added).[39] The question arises, of course, with regard to the contemporary use (and appropriateness) of the word "universal." In the past, the singular and the universal realms have been vigorously divided but now, when there is no universal sphere, there appears to be no particular instance either. Nevertheless, the connection between both concepts is crucial. Now, after Postmodernism failed to provide the final answers, the situation has changed, the borders between the two realms have been erased. Furthermore, there is simply no need for a clear distinction. One has in fact become the other and *vice versa*. If singular is universal than they both concur or, as Plumpe put it, "das Drama aber ist die Gattung des objektiven Idealismus der Identitätsphilosophie, in der Ich Welt, und Welt Ich sind" (I: 211).

Subjectivity has thus taken upon itself a new role of mediating between what had been before the "inside" and the "outside," between the "me" and the "you." The first indispensable condition for such a capability of distinguishing is the subject's own direct knowledge of him/herself and his/her self-realization. Only then can he/she enter into a relationship with the external reality because "*das individuelle Subjekt ist weder etwas Souverän-Fundamentales noch Unterworfenes, sondern eine sich wandelnde, semantisch-narrative und dialogische Einheit, die von der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Anderen, dem ihr Fremden, lebt*" (Zima 2000, 88). Such is the new real-life subjectivity that enters the theatrical world of mimesis.

Needless to say, the above notion of not ontological but, rather, deontological understanding of subjectivity had significant consequences for the genre of tragedy. The modernist solipsist position of the subject, which was so suitably described by Adorno, has been discarded by the radical postmodern stance.[40] In order to dodge the emptiness of values, to rid themselves of the traditional concepts hanging over their heads akin to Damocles's sword, postmodern theorists discarded the burden of such concepts.[41] Yet the

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39 Quite interestingly, Hegel had already argued, as Roche reports, that "the strength of any one individual is limited by ties to the existing order" (298). Thus, when there is no specific world-order supra-imposed on the individual subject, there is no need for any emphasis on self-definition.

40 Adorno writes that "der Standpunkt der radikalen Moderne sei der des Solipsimus, einer Monade, die der Intersubjektivität borniert sich versperre" (1973, 384).

41 Those structures were, specifically for drama, defined by Lukács, namely "für das neue Drama besteht […] seit dem Moment seiner Geburt das historische Problem. Das Wesen des Problems ist das

achieved goal did not meet the expectations. Patrice Pavis, an important theoretician of theatre, adds his criticism by maintaining that by virtue of the fact that "postmodern theatre raises theory to the rank of a playful activity" (71) bears its consequences, namely that the

> erasure of character, of inheritance, of memory, entails not the end of humanity, despite that misunderstood structuralist slogans may lead us to believe, but rather – and perhaps not any better – an avalanche of discourse which no longer claims to be linked to a visible action in the world, an inheritance which pours out on its heirs without giving them the choice of accepting, rejecting or selecting the best of it (68).

Again, the postmodern attitude that saw the world only through the prism of a play (as has been so in the enactment of the past) and the subject through its external relations with the world ended up loosing itself in the Borgesian labyrinth of play thus loosing also the contact with reality. Yet theatre in general and drama with tragedy in particular are concerned with very real life, very real people, habitually referring to their very real dilemmas. Therefore, they cannot afford to view reality as a sheer play. Post-deconstructive thought returns to the subject, thus touching upon Lukács who, following Hegel, stresses that "der Mensch ist der einzig wahre Stoff der Projizierung, Versinnlichung der tragischen Visionen; das tragische Gefühl ist ein ganz spezifisch zwischenmenschliches Gefühl" (1981, 209).[42]

The anti-humanist postmodern critique nonetheless achieved something with regard to subjectivity that had not been expected at all. Disassembling the modern-era subject resulted in causing the carrier of all different relations to become, for the first time after the establishing of the Cartesian *ego*, dependent on the external world again. The concept of subject makes a full circle and comes around to the position that is

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Hoffnungslose der Bewußtheit, die von vornherein feststehende Resultatlosigkeit der von Programmen ausgehenden Bewegungen" (1981, 55).

42 Lukács's thought stands parent to Szondi's definition of drama as "die Dichtungsform des je gegenwärtigen (1) zwischenmenschlichen (2) Geschehens (3)" (1969, 74). Szondi is still able to maintain there that "das Zwischenmenschliche (2) ist im Drama absolut, weil weder Inner- noch Außermenschliches neben ihm stehen" (76), because at his time there has been no need for the rescue action of the subject. Since the first publication of Szondi's book in 1959 the situation of the discussed concepts has dramatically changed.

spectacular twist, returns to the embrace of deontology, that is ethics and, thus, into the vicinity of Aristotle. It is here, I argue, that the new tragic hero has to be sought.

The poststructuralist critique of traditional concepts put a negative spin on the entire development in the direction of de-construction and procured few suggestions with regard to re-construction of the particles in hand. The predominant direction that the poststructuralist philosophers despite their later fierce opposition against such reading of their theory have given to their scholarship was one of relentless criticism. In this way, the theory found itself in a state of impasse. Now, questions arose as to the way out, although it was obvious that neither of the two extremes, the idealist or the deconstructionist, would prevail. Nevertheless, a new and quite significantly different approach, which made great strides in consolidation of the scholarship, has been offered by Emmanuel Lévinas, the philosopher constructively critical both of the classical German Idealism and the modern French philosophy.

Never having belonged to the current of Poststructuralism, Lévinas found himself in direct opposition to poststructuralist thought.[31] Still, it has to be noted, he always praised the work of his contemporaries. He did so with a small, yet significant liberty of considering their views not as an end in itself but, conversely, only a phase in the development of philosophy, only a stepping stone in the process of the re-construction of subjectivity. This is why his scathing critique is not levelled at the mandarins of Poststructuralism but rather at their followers, "those who – dreadfully well-informed, prodigiously intelligent, and more Derridian than Derrida – interpret his extraordinary work with the assistance of all the key-words at once, without having or leaving time to return to the thinking of which these words are contemporary" (1991, 6). Being of a strict speculative mind, Lévinas could not help but see the inconsistencies in the poststructuralist thought already at the very outset. For him, the path that was chosen did not lead to new conceptual approaches but rather consumed itself in negating the old ones. Now the problem arises because *negatio affirmatio est*, leading to enforcing the criticized pattern, even if only through its negation, something Lévinas found intolerable.

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31 For such direct statements cf. particularly Lévinas's *Otherwise than Being or, Beyond Essence.*

The main issue for the post-rational thought has been its complete rejection of the conceptual, that is speculative values for the subject's self-constitution. As I have already argued, the triad of absolute values (*bonum*, *verum*, *pulchrum*) has been perceived as the hub of human endeavours since antiquity. Later, with the modern-era rise of the subject and the shift of attention onto the concept, they all merged, into the idea of the essence. It took the pride of place in speculative philosophy, especially in ontology. Its central presupposition in the idealist vision has been the hermeneutics of the ultimate, not just contingent truths. The truth, having been understood as the vehicle through which the essence extrapolates itself has become thoroughly ingrained in any idealist discourse since, as it was perceived, the lack of the presence of truth would defy the purpose of philosophical exercise. Truth was initially longed for as the only ideal yet was begun, quite soon, to be viewed as a constraining entity. Therefore, after the crumbling of idealist systems, the subject was perceived finally to have been liberated and to have begun a true existence on its own. It is in this post-Hegelian sense that Kierkegaard made his claim that "la vérité [...] est l'acte de la liberté" (Sartre 1966, 26-27). This statement works both ways: through this newly acquired liberty of a human being, as Kierkegaard sees it, the subject can claim finally to be true to its self yet, at the same time, truth reveals itself in the act of freedom. Again, both elements reach their climax on the basis of a full-fledged, free subjectivity. The proof that the late-modern philosophical discourse could not rid itself of the concept, may be taken from the work of Martin Heidegger that emerged from the existentialist tradition and, in particular, from his *ontologische Differenz*, that is the one between essence and existence. As an apogee of traditional values, it was the idea of truth that was most affected by the poststructuralist criticism.

Parallel to philosophy, the concept of truth played a seminal role in the understanding of art. It gained a particular importance by liberating the subject from the idealist all-encompassing systems. The truth remained essential also for Benjamin, as a cover-concept for the purposefulness of art and particularly of tragedy. After posing all but rhetorical questions whether "the actions and attitudes depicted in a work of art have moral significance as images of reality? And: can the content of a work of art, in the last analysis, be adequately understood in terms of moral insights?" (1977, 104), Benjamin, although tempted to follow this thread, took a different path and chose "a negative

characteristic of antiquity. Subjectivity has, once again become fully overwhelmed by different forces and has been completely dissolved in the power-relations of external entities, ceasing to exist independently. Ancient society and the market economy end up bringing up the same thing: the loss of the individual subject/ego within the society and making him/her totally interchangeable. Post-rational theory, by denying the subject's self-constitution, took away from the concept his/her idea of the self. The ancient role of all-encompassing myth or even destiny has been supplanted by the external psychological, economic, political etc., power relations.

It is Flannery's contention that "myth, metaphor, and allegory are other traditional poetic devices employed by post-modernist artists to create theatre pieces intended to extend the boundaries of consciousness and thereby break down the barriers that divide people from one another" (84). This rather optimistic conclusion refers correctly to the "palimpsestuous" nature of Postmodernism yet misses the mark with regard to the outcomes of this process. Not only did the devolution of the subject bring about exactly the realization of one's own loneliness and disconnection, it also made this isolated subjectivity not only a fictitious "master" of him/herself but an issue of social relations. If anything then postmodern thought made us aware of the coincidental nature of the world and absolutely contingent quality of things we had believed to contain some higher knowledge and *telos*. Although this contingency had been introduced into the discourse very early by Nietzsche, it took a large leap only in postmodernist thought. Thus Nietzsche became the source of the postmodern idea of impermanence that comes close to the all-encompassing, similarly enigmatic and unfathomable concept of ancient destiny.

Yet the difference between them still remains striking. While before myth was believed to be a force pregnant with teleological significance, in Postmodernism this view fails. There is absolutely no teleology permitted in Postmodernism, no goal-oriented and -driven instances and issues. It is, therefore, necessary that new content replace the traditional concepts. Such an exercise has been undertaken by Naomi Conn Liebler who

for the term *hamartía* suggests a new glossing, namely that of "missing the mark."[43] This neologism should direct our attention more towards the hero's actions. Obviously, very much in accord with the modern-era conception of essentially active subjectivity who "earns" his/her deserved punishment (such has been, I should recall, Hegel's perception), attention is deliberately shifted away from the inherent character flaw, as had been the case in antiquity.

Nonetheless, the problem of the "tragic flaw" surfaces once again in Drakakis's and Liebler's joint introduction where their position shifts while taking the necessary bow towards the requirements of Postmodernism. In their opinion, "it is possible that the transference of *hamartia* from the domain of action to that of character has something to do with a modern/postmodern insistence on domination and/or self-determination, neither of which figured very prominently in classical or early modern culture. "Missing the mark" therefore redirects our attention away from modern modes of subjectivity and towards the issue of positionality" (8). It is hardly less true, regardless of the dissimilar disposition of the two periods as different as the ancient and the postmodern one, that the outcome of subject's own helplessness is strikingly similar. Where there is no notion of even a transcendental order, this void is filled out by fearful eventuality. And this eventuality, or better yet, contingency is a perfect medium for the development of the tragic condition. The basis of this contingency is that it fundamentally incapacitates human beings from obtaining, actively or passively, their goals, reaching their end, escaping their destructive situation. Such a contingency is a stable "state of affairs" that acts like a quicksand. Regardless of what the heroes do, they sink in the sand, while further away from them their potential goal escapes. This powerlessness becomes then, in fact, *la condition humaine* of all postmodern "subjectivities."[44] In other words, ancient Destiny has been as deceptive and illusory as the postmodern disassembled subject. Ludwig Marcuse, for example, states that "das zwanzigste Jahrhundert ist bisweilen

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43 She discusses this concept in her work *Shakespeare's festive tragedy the ritual foundations of genre* (42-43).

44 This "tragicality" of the human condition in postmodernism should not be, I should reiterate, equaled with the existentialist tragicality of life per se. The key difference lies in the understanding of subjectivity. Whereas in existentialism subjectivity is still a full-fledged concept, in postmodernism it is virtually non-existent.

untragisch genannt worden. Es fehlen die Voraussetzungen für jene frohe Gewißheit, die noch im achtzenten Jahrhundert Brennen und Morden in einen Hymnus auflösen konnte" (108).

This purely formal similarity between the ancient and the postmodern periods has been annulled with the emergence of the critique of Postmodernism, particularly with the introduction of the idea of dialogicality. As I have already argued, it is through this concept that the condition is met for the previously incongruent and adverse extremes to be now brought together into a delicate yet stable equilibrium. The key attribute of "dialogicality" is its ability to mend or, better still, bridge the gap between universality and singularity of the subject and to reveal their intricate and undeniable bond. Williams put it in a concise manner: "what was demanded was self-fulfillment, and any such process was a general liberation. The singular man, as a matter of speech, became plural and capital: Man" (1966, 95). This process had, of course, essential consequences for tragedy. Through "dialogicality" also tragedy, that is the genre for which the issues of self-constitution are crucial, is put back on track. This concept, with its conciliatory character, proves that the singular is as important as the universal or, better still, that singular is nothing less than universal itself. Even Lukács, as I have mentioned, was fully aware of the importance of the subject in relief since "the miracle of tragedy is a form-creating one; its essence is selfhood, just as exclusively as, in mysticism, the essence is self-oblivion" (1974, 160).

Now, if in Postmodernism the similarities between this period and antiquity could be detected, it is with the critique of the former that the historical discourse of modern-era subjectivism is also integrated. The characteristic of Postmodernism has been to broaden the chasm thus making it comparable with the mythical dependence of the ancient dramatic character. Yet this radical stance did not lead to any particular discovery with regard to drama other than to the realization of a dead end. It is well expressed by Elinor Fuchs who avers that "if theater comes after Virtue, what comes after Theater? We all want to get on with it. We are bored with all these gestures. Bored with Baudrillard's fascinated horror. Bored with Deleuze's giddy release. *Bored* with Derrida's infinitely discriminating canniness" (155). As a result, it becomes clearer that the path forward is to step back and inform oneself by the traditional concepts.

With the perseverance of the theatrical concepts and the inability of Poststructuralism to discredit them, our contemporary period has secured at least the theoretical premises for the possibility of dramatic tragedy. Also, with this stance the steady arc of development may be detected between antiquity and a contemporary version of the genre, despite its countless miscellaneous meanderings off the "ideal" track. Tragedy does not appear to be the genre of the past, belonging solely to a few particular periods but, rather, a steadily developing literary form. This, precisely, is the answer to the question asked by Geuss, namely "how exactly are we to construct a new tragic culture?" (xxvii). The individual merged with the universal, the "I" with the other, *Logos* with the unspeakable. That is why the "new tragic culture," which "will not just turn its back completely on the existing "theoretical culture," but will pass through it, assimilate it completely, and emerge, as it were, beyond on the other side of it" (ibid.) can take a permanent place again.

With this theoretical reconciliation of the singular with the universal, there is no need for *Trauerspiele* (Benjamin), or tragedies of self-sacrifice, stubbornness, opposition, awareness, suffering (for all of those cf. Roche).[45] The reconciliation provides a powerful reminder that tragedy cannot be viewed as elevated on an Aristotelian pedestal and isolated from its own period. Also, it cannot be considered unchangeable. Tragedy has to reflect its time, its societal micro- as well as civilizational macrocosm. Lukács was aware of this problem in modern theatre. He is convinced that "zeitlose Tragödien gibt es nicht [...] Und in der heutigen Epoche gibt es tragische Konflikte, wenn auch ihr Ausdruck dramatisch problematisch ist" (1981, 204). For theatre (and drama or tragedy) it is fundamental to restore the relation with the present, with the *hic et nunc* of the "real" life: "die Tragödie ist modern, wenn sie organisch aus dem heutigen Leben emporwächst"

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[45] Steiner, avering the ending of tragedy, hails the *Trauerspiel* by writing that "the *Trauerspiel* is counter-transcendental; it celebrates the immanence of existence even where this existence is passed in torment. It is emphatically "mundane", earth-bound, corporeal. It is not the tragic hero who occupies the centre of the stage, but the Janus-faced composite of tyrant and martyr" (1990, 16-17). With the unification of the opposites, *Trauerspiel*, which had been introduced as the remedy for the absolutization of the individual, appears as only a one-sided enterprise. It comes, then, as no big surprise that it can no longer claim the pride of place in representing the tragic reality.

(1981, 203), as Lukács further argues.[46] What is important is the link between the real contemporaneity and its theatrical rendition. This is what enables and, at the same time, guarantees space for tragedy. Thus, with the rejection of the anti-humanist and post-rational attitude, tragedy may become again, to paraphrase Maeterlinck's words, *le tragique quotidien*.

4.3 Contemporary Tragedy

This last theoretical section of my dissertation introduces a perspectrive on the tragic action in the context of the new subjectivity. As stated before, the key tragic ingredient for the philosophers of tragedy since German Idealism has been the conflict. This was possible only on presumption of an absolute and complete tragic subject. Now, after I have demonstrated the possibility of precisely such an entity even after the "anti-humanist" deconstruction, I should return to the concept of conflict in order to investigate it further.

Conflict has doubtlessly been the fundamental quality of tragedy. It went through an entire diapason of versions, from external to utterly internal. It too was threatened with annihilation. Yet today conflict too lost its *a priori* primacy. Put differently, the conflict no longer belongs to the realm of ontology. It fits very well the sphere of deontology, that is a concrete, pragmatic reality. As a consequence, I want to demonstrate in this section that all one can claim is the successful existence of a singular, individual tragic situation. Tragic is no more an absolute concept *a priori*. It may be perceived as a universal only, as I have explained in the previous chapter, through the individual, singular human being. The newly defined subject can only through his/her individuality attain certain degree of universality. It is in the tragic situation that this universality can open up completely.

For tragedy, such a turn of affairs is extremely important. The tragic protagonist returns to the genre with his/her idiosyncrasies and, through that, his/her universality is

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[46] Lukács follows here German Romanticism, particularly Goethean ideal of *Kunst* anchored in life as well as Hegelian identity of form and content.

also acknowledged. In this vein, the key features of tragedy are restored. Still, two additional conditions have to be fulfilled: the dramatic situation has to be unavoidable and irresolvable. Only then can a dramatic situation be called tragic. Only then is the previous meaning restored to the contemporary tragedy.

In this way, the supporters of the idea of contemporary tragedy and the tragedy's more or less steady development throughout the history (Williams being *primus inter pares*) have been successful in overcoming the biggest hurdle. If tragedy as a genre relies on individual subjectivity then it was most endangered in the periods that negated subjective independence, such as in the Christian Middle Ages, during certain strands of Modernism (Expressionism, Futurism), and Postmodernism. Nowadays, individuality has become unconditionally entangled with universality through the otherness, wherefore Miller's words that "we are often held to be below tragedy – or tragedy above us" (1978b, 3) can no longer be regarded as pertinent. Tragedy relies on both quality as well as quantity of subjectivity in play. Once subjectivity is not hindered from self-realization, tragedy's path to its constituting is freed. For the key feature of contemporary tragedy appears to be the very subtle and fragile balance between both selfhood and universality. This is what keeps it at bay from any danger of over-emphasizing one side or the other. Or, as Susanne Langer maintains, "the big unfolding of feeling in the organic, personal pattern of human life, rising, growing, accomplishing destiny and meeting doom – that is tragedy" (334).

The surge of the "resubjectified" individual brought along with it also a classical dilemma of his/her role in tragedy or, more specifically, his/her tragicality. The traditional view on this matter has supported the idea that only a full-fledged individual character conscious of his/her deeds can be truly tragic. Regardless of the fact that precisely this attitude caused a not insignificant conundrum with regard to the concept of tragic guilt, it has been perceived that the only true tragicality ensues from the hero's actions. This attitude is assumed by Wilkoszewska stating that "the tragic will be reached by someone who, while experiencing the paradoxicality of existence, is himself entangled in this paradox, whom this paradox or conflict concerns directly. In short – tragicality is only given to the tragic hero" (29). Yet during the postmodern anti-humanist phase the deontological independence of the subject has been cancelled. There has been nothing on

which the protagonists could base their decisions about their actions. Moreover, they appeared only as carriers of external relations, not even conscious of themselves. If subjectivity was not self-constituted but defined by societal conditions, there was no possibility for any autonomous action whatsoever. Or, in Roche's very traditional manner, "when, as in much of the modern and postmodern world, a single absolute is missing, the conflict of two absolute goods is even further removed" (303).

The concept of the tragic did not have any other option but to be broadened and to become more inclusive. Such is, for example, Szondi's position that makes good on the unity of elements included in the paradox of tragicality prior to its post-deconstructive phase. He lucidly maintains that "nur der Untergang ist tragisch, der aus der Einheit der Gegensätze, aus dem Umschlag des Einen in sein Gegenteil, aus der Selbstentzweiung erfolgt. Aber tragisch ist auch nur der Untergang von etwas, das nicht untergehen darf, nach dessen Entfernen die Wunde sich nicht schließt. Denn der tragische Widerspruch darf nicht aufgehoben sein in einer übergeordneten – sei's immanenten, sei's transzendenten – Sphäre" (1964, 58). Such a stance only reconfirms the fundamental shift in the perception of the tragic hero.[47] This has been to a certain extent accomplished already previously. For Lukács, Hebbel was the father of modern drama, precisely because of his realization. Not only unsuccessful action, but also pointless suffering may and also should be considered tragic. Thus, the uniqueness of the tragic hero has to give way to the new instance, the tragic victim. Moreover, the traditional "tragic hero" is no longer viable in our present era or, in Williams's words, "what we must trace, finally, is the transformation of the tragic hero into the tragic victim" (1966, 87). There are no conditions for a totally self-enclosed monadic subject who could, even only in drama, disregard his/her essential conditionality. The basic *modus operandi* of the new tragic entity, that is the victim, is a paradox. The victim consists of this paradox and, at the same time, lives it. Again, for Williams, the modern hero "in liberal tragedy is also the victim, who is destroyed by his society but who is capable of saving it" (1966, 44-45). The status of the tragic victim allows the dramatic hero to step over his/her limits as positivist subjectivity and to include in him/herself the new acquired realm of

universality. In this sense, the tragic victim is a larger, more inclusive and, consequently, fuller concept than the "active" hero. Lukács discussed this issue with an apparent premonition: "the final tension of selfhood overlaps everything that is merely individual. Its force elevates all things to the status of destiny, but its great struggle with the self-created destiny makes of it something supra-personal, a symbol of some ultimate fate-relationship" (1974, 160).

Dramatic Conflict

The essential entity for the functioning of tragedy, as I have already pointed out, is the conflict.[48] It came into the fore with the emergence of what Szondi calls "the philosophy of tragedy," that is with the romantic upsurge of the conceptual analysis of theatre.[49] In this concept the famous distinction between the character and his/her actions is brought together. These two have, needless to say, quite contrary views as to the nature and necessity of the conflict. If the individual subject would not have been previously separated, by no smaller an authority than Aristotle himself, from his/her actions in antiquity, the obsoleteness of the conflict would not be as obvious in Postmodernism as it has become. The conflict has been imposed on a postmodern dramatic character from the outside, that is by the entity that conditions his/her existence. By moving the subject's "ontological" levers to the outside, postmodern art also renounces any necessity of the conflict. Nonetheless, with the slow demise of the anti-humanist theoretical and artistic articulations, with the re-individualization of the subject the importance of the conflict has been augmented again.

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47 This issue has been initially discussed in the second chapter with special attention to Hebbel.

48 Asmuth, among many, concedes that the conflict has to be seen as "das Kernstück der meisten Dramenhandlungen" (141).

49 While Bentley suggests that "Lessing must surely be the first major writer to see quite clearly that, since it is conflict and not outward action upon which the drama depends, there could be a drama in which the basic conflict was one of ideas" (1960, 51), Plumpe raises an assumption that "wichtiger ist zweifellos die Tragödie, in der sich das freie Subjekt und die unerbittliche Welt gegenüberstehen [...] Der Konflikt zwischen Freiheit und Notwendigkeit ist "tragisch" zu nennen, wenn keine der beiden Seiten obsiegt, sondern wenn sie sich wechselseitig neutralisieren und in der Position der Indifferenz neutralisieren" (I: 209).

Dramatic conflict has been assigned only two major alternatives that come to the fore in the present amalgamation of the oppositions. The first form, generally considered the classical one, is the external conflict, the standard discord on the basis of the subject's opposition, conscious or not, to the prevalent force. Its characteristic is based on the conception of the subject as a full-fledged monadic structure, enclosed in itself, therefore necessarily absolute, which automatically positions everything and everybody else outside of him/her. This is the type of the conflict that always has to be external relative to the subject and that is described by Asmuth as the "Parteikonflikt" (144 *et passim*). This conflict, for Hegel subject to the ultimate reconciliation in substantiality, is the one that the philosopher uses as the hub of his understanding of tragedy, that is the conflict between "einigen sittlichen Mächten in der wahrhaften Wirklichkeit" (II: 551). Therefore, "das Tragische vornehmlich auf der Anschauung solch eines Konflikts und dessen Lösung beruht" (ibid.). This line has been sustained predominantly by neo-Hegelians and other sympathizers of this train of thought, such as neo-Marxist theorist Lucien Goldmann,[50] or Mark William Roche,[51] despite the fact that even Hegel himself allowed for a more inclusive understanding of the concept, especially with regard to his contemporary romantic dramatic characters. He explicitly states that "der Konflikt, zu welchem die äußeren Voraussetzungen allerdings den Anlaß darbieten, wesentlich in dem *Charakter* liegt, dem die Individuen in ihrer Leidenschaft nicht um der substantiellen Berechtigung willen, sondern weil sie einmal sind, was sie sind" (II: 576).

The second form of the conflict appeared with the formation of the modern-era subject. In the post-Cartesian world, human beings were defined through their constituting doubt, which is the reason for the conscious internal insecurity of the individual. This type of conflict has been given many forms throughout its development, yet achieved the most radical variant in Modernism.[52] This type of conflict dominated in the post-Renaissance dramatic plays since the subject has been gradually losing its

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50 He claims that "in itself, the world is not contradictory and ambiguous, and not every mind sees it with these qualities. It only becomes contradictory and ambiguous when a man lives wholly in order to achieve absolute and impossible values" (67).

51 For Roche, "greatness of character placed in action, that is, in collision with an opposing force, leads to tragic suffering. Both the moment of greatness and the moment of collision are essential" (36).

52 It has been noted although not completely admitted by Hegel (cf. Fuchs 27).

absoluteness, the conflict moved into him/herself, thus becoming the conflict not of action but, rather, that of positionality, of character. In Asmuth's view, this is the "Urteilskonflikt," "der psychische" or "der innere Konflikt" (143-44). If there would be any conflict viable in Postmodernism, it would be, most probably, the internal one.[53]

In contemporary era these two different positions have come together. Once again it is possible to refer to subjectivity without "bad conscience." Once again, subject him/herself as well as his/her psychology are not viewed as an anathema. This middle ground has been well described by Williams who avers that "the conflict within the tragic hero tends to replace the conflict which is embodied in particular men [...] The history of spirit in the world [...] loses its general and objective character, and becomes a working within individuals" (1966: 34-35). Namely, if "in der griechischen Tragödie nun ist es nicht etwa böser Wille, Verbrechen, Nichtswürdigkeit oder bloßes Unglück, Blindheit und dergleichen, was den Anlaß für die Kollisionen hervorbringt, sondern, wie ich schon mehrhaft sagte, *die sittliche Berechtigung zu einer bestimmten Tat*" (Hegel II: 564, emphasis added), then now, in the merger of the ethical realm with the ontological, it is even clearer that the contemporary concept includes both action (activeness) and positionality (passiveness). Now, if the conflict is truly so omnipresent as I have described above, it appears to blur the distinguishing features between different kinds of dramatic plays, specifically between drama and tragedy. Contemporary activity and positionality have merged together and have ceased to be discernible. Positionality is always relative, thus its previous traditional inadmissibility into tragedy, yet it has been allowed to emerge in tragedy because the subject took on universal qualities. Since the conflict, for the reason of its immanent orientation towards activity, cannot serve as the litmus test for the tragicality of a particular contemporary condition, new instances have to be sought out in order to fill this gap. This instance appears to be the concept of the tragic situation.

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[53] Other strains of extreme modernism have already eradicated any form of the conflict. As Manfred Pfister asserts, in Beckett's dramas there is no conflict to be found. Yet does that really mean that there is none? It has been also proved by, among others, Adorno in his book on Beckett that the absence of conflict cannot, at the same time, mean the lack of the tragic experience. Even in the case of Beckett, who is hailed as the first to have eradicated any teleology from his plays, the situation is quite the opposite.

Tragic Situation

Perceived in this way, conflict is a yard stick of the philosophy of tragedy that, in turn, is based predominantly on the idealist conception of the subject. It became, among others, the essential issue for Hegel in his definition of tragedy. Only action that is tragic can be accomplished on the basis of a conscious volition and necessarily leads to the hero's demise. The essence of the tragic, in such a case, is that both conflicting sides, be it objective (powers that be) or subjective (individual claims), have the truth on their side, both are right because both belong to substantiality. However, any of these (at least) two truths is utterly incompatible with the other, wherefore the conflict ensues, until the annihilation of one of them. The newly reestablished dramatic subject ends up claiming its conceptual superiority. In other words, if conflict is based on ontological premises then the situation rests on the deontological ones. Having fought back from the postmodern vision of the world the right to exist as an independent entity, subjectivity could not simply dismiss the issue of its relativity raised by the poststructuralist theories. Therefore, the new subjectivity is not exclusive (such was, for example, the Hegelian subject) but inclusive. This is among the most important characteristics that Postmodernism has bestowed upon the subject. By making subjectivity totally dependent on the external levers of power, it desubjectified the autonomous form of the concept that, in turn, obliterated the distance in drama between the dramatic hero (the subject) and ourselves (the audience). In a more traditional understanding of tragedy, naturally following Aristotle, the essential device for a "proper" reading of tragedy was the audience's empathy for the heroes, which was each and every time supposed to peak in the feeling of catharsis. For that, complicated mechanisms of empathy coupled with mimetic imagination had to be put in place in order to fathom the connection between the protagonist and the audience. These complex mechanisms were the commonality of experience that, in turn, was based on the same value system, ideals, and absolutes *sine qua non*.

Today, tragedy has been brought back closer to the reality in which we partake. We do not have to share the same value systems with protagonists, we do not have to

undergo intricate intellectual as well as emotional operations in order to feel empathy (which is but a compulsory emotional identification with the protagonist) with the heroes, and to see them as our likeness. With the universalization of contemporary subjects their experience is broadened to the extent that any and every hero may stand for ourselves. Since the topics of contemporary tragedies are not myths, or some past aristocratic episodes, the distance (which was needed for underscoring the importance of role models) between the hero and the spectator is minimized. The revivification and broadening of modern subjectivity elevated the internal (subjective) plane to a level equal to the external one. The consequence of this move has been that the two extremes have proved useless. The claim about the essential suffering (perpetuated either by the Christian idea of the original sin or by "social Darwinism') of human existence, which found a strong advocate in Schopenhauer, appears to be as inadequate as the statement that only conscious action can entangle heroes in the tragic conflict and, consequently, bring suffering upon them. Drakakis and Liebler provide proof of the wide acceptance of this view by bringing forward the example of Adorno's view of the tragic. It consists, they maintain, of "a process that simultaneously recognizes fatalism and elicits human fortitude in the face of irresolvable difficulty. That difficulty invariably involves suffering that Adorno defined as "objectivity that weights upon the subject"" (18). Human existence is absolutely not necessarily tragic *per se* (the fact that we all are doomed at the end is not tragic), as well as every conscious action, often enough, does not mean perpetrator is doomed. Williams, for example, agrees with the universalization and, to a degree, relativization of the tragic because "the tragic action is about death but it need not end in death unless this is enforced by a particular structure of feeling. Death, once again, is a necessary actor but not the necessary action" (1966, 58). His statement appears to echoe Sartre's thought on death in which he states that "la mort [...] *abolit* radicalement le subjectif, mais ne le change pas" (1966, 57).

The tragic develops from a very concrete, each time different and individual, conflicting situation. The traditional requirement for the uniformity of the tragic experience (empathy and catharsis), that necessarily led to increasing of deviations in reception (cf. chapter on tragedy), has been replaced by its universality with the stress more on its content and less on its form. The ontological *telos* of existence has been

replaced by a deontological openness of the situation.[54] Its tragicality does not appear at the end when the hero realizes there is no way out. Tragic situation comprises more than simply the conflict, it encompasses more by way of including the dramatic hero's presence or, better still, immersion in the tragic situation. Universality is, of course, far from the absolute concept of philosophical Idealism, since it reflects infinity, not totality. This universality refers solely to a certain level of sameness in human experience. Suffering and death are our common lot yet, still, in both instances we are truly alone, in the sense that no one else can experience them for us.[55]

Therefore, the tragic is not an absolute concept but, on the contrary, a relative one since it always has to be considered in relation to the characteristic and (non)attainability of protagonist's goals or desires, it depends on the situation. This is why Aristotle prescribed with such care the type of character allowed in staging the tragic action. The character has to "match" his/her aspirations – and this struggle has to be futile, its balance has to be negative, the situation tragic. The tragic is thus defined by the relation between the subject's existence and its possible goals. In some cases this relation is conscious, in others subconscious, yet in all of them the relation is all-encompassing. This is what I would call the "contingency of tragic." It is this relation that cannot be fully explained by the idea of the conflict but only through the concept of the "tragic situation." It is through the tragic situation that one does full justice to the tragic subject in his/her form of the tragic hero as well as the tragic victim.[56]

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54 Williams describes it by stating that "at the center of liberal tragedy is a single situation: that of a man at the height of his powers and the limits of his strength, at once aspiring and being defeated, releasing and destroyed by his own energies. The structure is liberal in its emphasis on the surpassing individual, and tragic in its ultimate recognition of defeat or the limits of victory" (1966, 87).

55 Parallel to this, the tragic never was received communally or in a group because the reception of the tragic, on its most basic level, may only be subjective. This is why spectators go to the theatre in order to have somebody else experience it instead of them. They play a game, pretend they are Oedipus, or Hamlet, or Roberto Zucco, for a couple of hours, and then go home. It is a very introverted, internalized game, which everybody plays for him/herself. This refers us back to the Kantian notion of the experience of the sublime. In this sense, tragic is a cultured concept, one that is taught and learned. Unfortunately, this is too big an issue to be even tackled here.

56 Interestingly enough, the idea of a "theatre of situations" has already been put forward by Sartre. In *Forger des mythes* (written in 1946), he expresses the conviction that the "theatre of character" should be replaced by the former. There, the subject-matter should be "a man who is free within the circle of his own situations, who chooses, whether he wishes or not, for everyone else when he chooses for himself," thus proving the interest in "a return to tragedy" (all quotes 1976, 36). Still, what Sartre is

As a conclusion to his own discussion on tragedy, Williams writes that "tragedy, we are told, is not simply death and suffering, and it is certainly not an accident. Nor is it simply a response to death and suffering. It is, rather, a particular kind of event, and a type of response, which are genuinely tragic, and which the long tradition embodies" (1966, 14). It is this "particular kind of event" and "type of response" that determines the category of the situation and, with that, also whether it can be added to the tragic. The tragic situation, since it does not rely solely on discord, has to correspond to or fulfill two requirements. In the first place, only the situation that is unavoidable can have a predisposition to be counted among the tragic ones. There are many conflictual situations in the real world, yet most are resolved without the significant aggravation of the argument. Dramas do revolve around arguments, yet only those that despite all the hero's action (or precisely because of them) cannot be peacefully resolved, may become tragic. As Williams puts it, "not all conflicts of this kind lead to tragedy. There is only tragedy when each side finds it necessary to act, and refuses to give way" (1966, 35). However for the tragicality to take its full toll, dramatic play must be also irresolvable. Regardless of the hero's action or passivity, when the dramatic situation can either be settled only through the elimination of one of the sides or not be settled at all (contemporary endings often prefer not a fatal ending but a more lenient yet equally difficult choice of enduring the *status quo*). For this reason only situations fulfilling these two conditions can be called tragic.

Seen from this perspective, Etienne Souriau's explanation of the dramatic situation does not differ much: "Il n'y a pas non plus de situations tragiques: les situations des tragédies sont, purement et simplement, des situations dramatiques" (53), although at this point, the differences appear. For him, "le tragique est atmosphérique, au moins à première vue: il porte à l'extrême [...] la grandeur de la réalité et de l'humanité" (ibid.). This greatness, he later states, is based on the unequal conflict of the character with death, because "le dramatique, en soi at à lui seul, est plutôt une intensification existentielle" (54). Since this statement does not correspond to the contemporary state of

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lacking is, in my opinion, the "other" side of the full subjectivity, that is the issues emphasized by Poststructuralism and later taken into account in the construction of the new subject.

wegen ihr sühnt, obwohl sein Untergang in keinem organischen Zusammenhang mit ihr steht" (1981, 158). A certain amount of "tragic guilt" belongs to the dramatic character, although this guilt does not have a direct relation to the character's demise. It has become obvious, and with the shift in the perception of the subject from the ontological to the deontological one quite evident that the concept of guilt has lost its place in contemporary tragedy. Guilt can be established on the basis of teleological principles (which are supposed to be, in one way or another, contradicted and refuted). Since ethics now serves as the basis for the existence, these two realms merge and also guilt no longer appears to be sustainable. For a tragic situation and for suffering guilt is not absolutely necessary. Therefore, given the post-deconstructive perspective in which there is very little requirement for guilt, this does not hinder tragedy from developing. Thus, the tragic is not a concept that can be known and defined ahead of time but only, and here we return to Aristotle, *ex post*. It is only *a posteriori* that we can realize whether a situation has been truly unavoidable.[60]

Irresolvability

Still, a situation cannot be tragic unless it fulfills a second condition, in addition to its unavoidability. It must also be irresolvable. Traditional scholarship saw the resolution of the conflict and all hero's action, the hero's passivity notwithstanding, only through death. Yet death "resolves" the issue only by removing one of the players and not by bringing the differences in the argument to a mutually acceptable conclusion. That is, the collision does not end with both sides victorious. Either one of the sides in conflict subsides and the tension abates (even if only seemingly), or both sides survive, yet the opposition remains and the conflictual situation is not mollified. In this sense, I purport, Hegel's final synthesis of substantiality rings somewhat hollow given the fact that it can reach its appeasement, in most cases of course, only through the subject's annihilation.

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rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation, are "flawless." Most of us are in that category" (1978b, 4).

60 In addition to that, even Souriau has to concede that "la réalité du moment [...] n'est absolument tragique que si de toute manière cette destruction est inévitable" (54).

For Schelling, as Plumpe showed, the reconciliation of the tragic conflict has been exactly the same, namely "die Versöhnung des tragischen Konflikts deutet Schelling also als Symbol des Absoluten" (Plumpe I: 210). The reconciled substantiality is thus absolute, which only shows Idealism's vision of the subject as an instance subjected to the absolute character of substantiality. Such an idealist totality has been successfully removed by the postmodern critique. Ferdinand Brunetière explains this in *The Law of the Drama* where he maintains that "if these obstacles are recognized to be insurmountable, or reputed to be so, as were, for example, in the eyes of the ancient Greeks, the decrees of Fate [...] as are, for us, the laws of nature, or the passions aroused to frenzy [...] – it is tragedy" (77-78).

This is, of course, not to say that irresolvability as such is anything particularly new to the theoretical discourse on tragedy. The irresolvability of the conflict has been viewed as essential for tragedy as soon as conflict has been seen as the hub of the genre, that is, with the introduction of the philosophy of tragedy in Idealism or romanticism. Goethe already disclosed his thoughts to Eckermann by saying that "alles Tragische beruht auf einem unausgleichbaren Gegensatz. Sowie Ausgleichung eintritt, oder möglich wird, schwindet das Tragische" [*Unterhaltungen mit Goethe*] as well as the fact that the tragic conflict "keine Auflösung zuläßt" [*Zu Eckermann*, 28. 3. 1827].[61] It is important to note, however, the fundamental difference between Goethe's and the present-day view on the irresolvability. This is the time when subjectivity could not have been firmer and more self-conscious. From this point of view, it is the conscious subject who takes upon him/herself the entire world and, as Goethe remarked, enters into a conflict that cannot be settled. Clearly, the subjectivity has to give way to the world's way yet the belief was there that he/she can challenge literally everything. Goethe's own magnificent creation *Faust* may be used as a perfect example for such an optimist position. Moreover, Faust manages to escape the position he has gotten himself into by virtue of a *deus ex machina*. Needless to say, our contemporary post-deconstructive position is all but contrary to the romantic-idealist view. The subject has been denied his/her own absolute essence, the only way he/she can constitute him/herself is through the external relation with the self as

the other, through his/her own externalization. At the same time, already since Hebbel, the subject's actions have been equated with his/her passive suffering. One does not need to be a Nietzschean hero in order to become tragic. Furthermore, the truth that has been so emphasized by theorists, and the ensuing relation between legality and legitimacy, have lost their *à priori* meaning.[62] There is no right or wrong in the post-deconstructive world available any more or, put differently, for becoming a tragic hero one needs neither to be right or wrong. For that it is enough to find oneself in a tragic situation, as I shall prove with the example of Koltès's *Roberto Zucco*.

It is significant to note that for finding oneself in an irreconcilable position, one does not even have to take part in an argument. It may simply prove itself through mere existence. This element has been quite rightfully deciphered by Susanne Langer who writes about the dramatic character that "when he reaches his limit of mental and emotional development, the crisis occurs; then comes the defeat, either by death or, as in many modern tragedies, by hopelessness that is the equivalent of death, a "death of the soul," that ends the career" (358). The irreconcilability of the tragic situation lies in the fact that it cannot be changed while its perpetuation inflicts great suffering and pain on the tragic hero.

While concluding this chapter on present-day subjectivity in tragedy I forward the idea about the essential sameness of the genre throughout its evolution as well as its survival. In my attempt at reevaluating the state of tragedy today I considered the genre with regard to its ancient roots and included it in the process of the development of the human mind. What appears to have remained as a common denominator for different forms of the genre are not their idiosyncrasies, such as types of characters, their appropriateness, different types of their reception but, rather, one basic function: action.

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61 Both quotes from Szondi 30.

62 A good example of this train of thought is Jasper's position on the tragic. Very much entangled in the traditional values, he writes "tragedy occurs wherever the powers that collide are true independently of each other. That reality is split, that truth is divided, is a basic instinct of tragic knowledge" (1953, 57). Furthermore, he insists "reality is divided against itself, and so is truth. Truth opposes truth and must defend its own rightful claim not only against injustice, but also against the rightful claims of other truths. Tragedy is real because irreconcilable opposition is real" (1953, 95). It is obvious that the entire construction on which the traditional ontology and teleology were based has fallen down. For

This realization, of course, is far from revolutionary. Since the conception of the subject in its modern-era Cartesian form, action has prevailed over all other characteristics. Nonetheless, this action has been perceived as that of a conscious mind, always a result of a mindful character. With the postmodern denial of a full-fledged independent character the process appears to have come full circle and connected again with the antiquity: other forces have taken over from what used to be seen as subject and plunged him/her into a complete ontological and existential dependence. This fundamental realization of the subject's failed omnipotence has nevertheless not led to its annihilation. This is why the post-deconstructive thought tries to find the balance between the two extremes and to find a middle way, which will provide the new perspective on subjectivity.

The isolation of the tragic genre to the conflictual situation, defined as unavoidable and irresolvable, may be met with criticism. Yet in my view, only such rather minimalist differentiation may provide a versatile enough definition to be applied to different periods and forms. Moreover, it does not touch upon other genres, such as bourgeois drama, melodrama, tragicomedy etc. This suggested view on tragedy tries to arrive at a middle path, allowing subjectivity independence while still exposed to external forces, however conclusive they might be; it relies on the subject's action, yet includes also its passive, non-idealist form.

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the moment, there seems to exist no possibility of, or even interest in rebuilding such a system of values.

5. CONTEMPORARY TRAGIC DRAMATIC WORKS

The last section of the thesis is devoted to discussing contemporary plays with regard to the philosophical views developed in the previous chapters. As I have suggested, my analysis will pay very close attention to the main characters in the plays and compare them to the philosophical theories of the subject. It is my hope that I shall be able to make the reading of the chosen plays as tragedies appear plausible, if not necessary.

In order to put forward my claim that contemporary plays do contain and develop their heroes in the form of tragic subjectivities, it is imperative to show that different developmental stages of the theoretical concept will be encountered. Therefore, each of the four discussed plays will be considered with regard to a different stage of the development of the subject. As the starting point I embrace the period in which the subjectivity reached its conceptual apogee, German Idealism and classical romantic vision of the tragedy that also coincides with the inception of the "philosophy of tragedy." I shall trace the development of other stages of the concept as they appear in contemporary plays.

Bernard-Marie Koltès's *Roberto Zucco* (1988) by belonging to both realms of the modern and the ancient, almost effortlessly lends itself to a Hegelian reading. The hero, in the way he is conceived, reveals as many ancient tragic characteristics as do the more post-Renaissance subjective traits as conceptualized by the philosopher. Also, the quality of the hero corresponds to the subjectivity Hegel perceived in the romantic tragedy of his own time. The next play, *Doc*, by Sharon Pollock (1984) which follows illustrates a partial negation of the Hegelian omnipotent and omniscient idealist construct. The heroes in *Doc* may be approached through, as Lukács claimed, the first true theory of modern drama, that is through Hebbel's view on the internalized form of the subject. This, in turn, evokes echoes of later Kierkegaardian as well as Sartrean epistemology. Although the subjects in this play are quite stable, not to say static, they do expose a shifted, self-contained and self-realized modern quality. The first two plays still show, in my opinion,

the traditional scholarly approach to tragedy and the subject revealing the essential, ontological form of the concept.

The following two plays provide good examples of the further development of the concept. David Greig's characters from his play *Europe* (1994) fit very well the analysis through the lens of Heideggerian ontology, which almost naturally leads us into Derridean deconstruction theory and Foucaultian Poststructuralism. These characters already inhabit the spacious levels of different realms, contributing to their constitution or, better yet, self-realization as subjects. Although there the subjectivity is constructed from smaller pieces it still retains its fundamental concreteness, which is even further removed in the last play, Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991). The subjects in Kushner's play confidently show a newly grasped theoretical concept of dialogical subjectivity, as opposed to the dialectical one. I shall analyze its heroes through the theories of Lévinas and Zima to analyze their volatile, yet decisive subjectivity. All of the above makes the latter two plays appear as theoretically very up-to-date, poststructuralist concepts with novel, that is deontological subjectivities.

Through the analysis of these four plays it is my goal to provide sufficient proof that the subject has not disappeared at all from contemporary drama. Furthermore, all four texts will be assessed according to the quality of their conflict, together with its unavoidability and irresolvability, securing their place in the acclaimed classical genre of dramatic tragedy.

5.1 Bernard-Marie Koltès, *Roberto Zucco*

The first play I chose for discussion is Koltès's *Roberto Zucco* since its subjectivity, in addition to its contemporary analyses, lends itself perfectly to an analysis according to the traditional philosophy of tragedy, most notably that developed by Hegel.[1] The philosopher proves to be of seminal importance not only for explaining the

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[1] These analyses are such as those by Jean-Claude Lallias, Lluis Pasqual, Travis Preston, Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, to name just a few.

construction of Zucco's dramatic subject, but also as a hermeneutic parallel with regard to the structurally similar Attic play, Sophocles's *Antigone*, which Hegel praised as "das vortrefflichste, befriedigendste Kunstwerk" (II: 568). The conflict in *Roberto Zucco* is as intricate and has as many constituent parts, if not even more, than the ancient model praised by Hegel. It is because of this immanent similarity that both Hegel's approach and theory of tragedy appear to be very effective and helpful in the analysis of this play. Zucco's character can therefore be analyzed on two levels – as a modern-era subject corresponding to Hegel's romantic tragic heros as well as an ancient tragic character whose traits it indisputably contains.

Even today, well over a decade after his premature death of aids in 1989, Bernard-Marie Koltès still ranks among those challenging French authors whose works are among the most frequently staged both in France as well as throughout the world. *Zucco* is Koltès's last play written "just before dying,"[2] which is why it demands, as Jean-Claude Lallias puts it, "une place singulière" (128).[3] Given its "puissance énigmatique – voire scandaleuse" (Lallias 5) with which it keeps grasping the audience, comparisona of Koltès to Shakespeare, Molière, Beckett and their likes can trigger but very little surprise. His immense popularity, based on a truly fundamental depth of his texts as well as their openness to ever novel theatrical readings, proves Koltès to be an author of significant weight.

The conflict in *Roberto Zucco* presents a traditional clash between an individual and the society this individual inhabits. Quite traditionally, this conflict is laid out externally and not, as in many contemporary plays, as an internally shaped divergence where the hero suffers from a split personality. These conflicts, typical already for post-Renaissance but especially for modernist theatre, scarcely need the external framework. On the contrary, Zucco's is a firm and clearly outlined character. His decisiveness is painted with such a vehemence that it sometimes seems quite simplistic, even unnatural within the scope of our contemporary dramatic repertoire. Yet this does not take anything away from the character, but rather adds richness, multifacetedness, and at the same time

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2 This is also the title of Scene 8 (171).

3 It premiered in 1990 at the Berlin Schaubühne under the direction of Peter Stein.

clarity. In this multi-layered existence, Zucco's depiction is in line with the present-day postmodernist aleatory techniques such as palimpsest, pastiche, and collage but still retaining clarity and readability.

Furthermore, Koltès underscores his critical position by introducing a particular emotional mode into the play. The action and, consequently, also the characters, are painted in a rather simplistic, single-faceted manner. There appears to be no particular depth to the protagonists. They seem to exist only on the surface of the play, leading thus a kind of marionette life similar to, for example, the expressionist thesis-plays where the intended theses have been underlined and the polyvalence of the world suppressed to the detriment of the broadness of its representation. Roberto Zucco, for example, is the only protagonist with a full name. All the rest are only schematically described as La gamine, Sa soeur, Son frère, Son père, Sa mère, Le vieux monsieur, La dame élégante (in Martin Crimp's 1997 English translation these characters appear as A girl, Her sister, Her brother, Her father, Her mother, An old gentleman, An elegant lady) etc. In this manner, Koltès's play is reminiscent of the characters of Strindberg's "station-drama" in which individual characters enter the play only in order to fulfill their role in a particular station. Thus, these characters appear to be designed almost as one-dimensional. Zucco proceeds through different scenes and almost everyone portrays him in a different situation. Still, as in expressionist plays, this process does not account for Zucco's development. What this technique effectively presents to us each time is just a simple individual situation without any particular intellectual pyrotechnics, yet it is rich enough to offer the foundation on which to build conclusions. Nevertheless, Koltès does not want to further his agenda without refinement. Instead, he uses the short expressive scenes to make emotionally charged statements that are still easy to comprehend. By not offering elaborate and intellectually demanding dialogue he reaches the same result simply by juxtaposing these minimal situations. In their eloquent simplicity they speak for themselves particularly because they are placed in an obvious conflict between their description and appearance. In this way, Zucco's infantile attitude, together with his incapability of maturely assessing his situation, give rise to the audience's subliminal conclusions with regard to his innocently childish objectivity while simultaneously

lending faith to his monothematic character. In other words, it is precisely because of Koltès's portraiture of Zucco that he appears to be a credible and consistent character.

A classical conflict in tragedy, according to Aristotle and numerous commentators after him including Hegel, springs from an issue which the two clashing sides assess differently. Yet, as has been the case in antiquity, the ethical dimension of the conflict is based on a presumption that both sides are, in their own right, correct. Thus the clash appears between the two powers, one of which (the world, society, state etc.) has a legal right to maintain its own position, whereas the other (the individual) opposes this from his/her legitimate right to defend religious or ethical conventions, moral usages, even personal convictions. The central issue in laying out the conflict and making it truly tragic lies in the way it reaches across the subjective limits of an individual. Such a conflict necessarily has to revolve around decisive issues pertaining to be of broad human importance and therefore capable of encompassing larger communities. In Hegel's words, "im menschlichen Handeln [kann] die Grundlage bestimmter Zwecke aus den konkreten Gebieten der Familie, des Staats, der Kirche usf. nicht ausbleiben" (II: 573). Put differently, in place of the ancient myth came the constituent elements, that is the ideals and values of a modern society.

Inside Koltès's hermeneutic loop, we are acquainted with Zucco from the perspective of the world, his adversary that makes every effort to convince the audience that Zucco is a bad character. For instance, he is introduced as a murderer who killed his father by throwing him out of the window. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, an unequivocal evaluative conclusion is induced right at the outset of the play in an introductory dialogue between two prison guards, a discussion recalling the opening lines in *Hamlet*. In it, the two men discuss the viciousness of the acts Zucco committed: "Pur vice, je te dis" (12), one of them exclaims. The parameters of the represented world are clearly stated – this is a society that strongly rejects any kind of crime, especially patricide. Furthermore, the audience discovers that Zucco has escaped from prison, refusing to pay his debt to society. He is thus portrayed as a danger to society. Thus a link between the on-stage world and the audience is established, since the latter recognizes the values of the stage-world as its own. Therefore, the world of the audience is connected with the stage-world. This instigates a subliminally comfortable recognition and

subsequent feelings of identification. The world in which murders are considered incomprehensible and a product of sheer evil while their perpetrators have to be locked in prisons so as not to endanger other law-abiding citizens, is the world of order, compassion, philanthropy, good will, moderate happiness, contentment, etc. Koltès's tendency to represent his characters and the world, in which they live in rather simple terms, establishes an easy rapport with the audience. The subsequent changes are harder to accept.

The proof that Koltès really wants the audience to at first agree on Zucco's mercilessness, cruelty, and brutality becomes evident from the subsequent portraiture of the character. The first thing Zucco does after having escaped from prison is to pay a visit to his mother. Yet not as we would expect, to find a safe haven from his pursuers, but utterly devoid of any emotions, in order to find his fatigues that he needs for his future life as escapee and to become "invisible." Again, the subliminal message is stark: evil, which does not want to renounce its previous doings and wants, moreover, to become unnoticeable to others only to continue more successfully an obsessively cruel and truly dangerous plan, is revealed in his murder of his mother.

Already in the second scene, entitled "Meurtre de la mère" (13),[4] Koltès introduces a double perspective, albeit subtle, that will become clearer at the later stages of the play. Zucco's Mother namely appears to be everything but forgiving and motherly. Instead of embracing him as her child and, despite its gravity, pardon him his sin, she appears to be a proper, law-abiding citizen. In this way she stands for the average person, including the audience. She calls Zucco "malade cinglé" (14), "fou" (17), claims that "Même les chiens, dans ce quartier, te regarderont de travers" (14), and, finally, she renounces him as her son: "Tu n'es plus mon fils, c'est fini. Tu ne comptes pas davantage, pour moi, qu'une mouche à merde" (14). Although frightened, she violently obstructs Zucco in his search for the fatigues and he strangles her.

To the audience that is not aware of his ulterior motives, Zucco and his actions appear to be absolute evil. This is further emphasized as he literally staggers from one

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[4] This interchange interestingly constructs a dialogue that Iocasta and her son and husband Oedipus might have potentially led. Their parameters are strikingly similar.

offense to another. Although the next thing he does is not a murder, he still destroys the life of a young girl by taking her virginity. In this example, Zucco caught and forcefully took advantage of a rather shy and obedient young girl. When confronted by her caring Sister, her silence gives an impression of her being traumatized. Her stance is underscored by not responding to her Sister's grim realization, "Ou alors il faudrait que l'on t'ait fait violence, et cela, qui oserait le faire, à une gamine comme toi, si pure, si vièrge? Dis-moi, dis-moi qu'on ne t'a pas volé cela, n'est-ce pas, qui ne doit pas t'être volé. Réponds. Réponds ou je me fâche" (21). The girl's silence automatically reveals the worst possible suspicions.

After hearing Zucco's Mother talk about his patricide and, consequently, seeing her too being killed, after his ruthless treatment of the girl where one may only feel relieved that she was able to save her own life, there is very little doubt that Zucco is a psychopathological murderer, the embodiment of "pur vice." But because up until this point Koltès has not given a reason for Zucco's behaviour, the worst can be expected. His wickedness is thus firmly established as an objectively valid one.

Such an apogee is reached in Zucco's next murder. There, the victim is chosen and murdered purely "by association" with the target whereas from an objective point of view it is, as it appears, completely pure and innocent person. In a park, Zucco is invited by an elegant Lady to join her on a bench while her fourteen-years-old son is playing in the playground. After a short discussion it becomes obvious to the audience that Zucco wants her car. Later in this altercation Zucco takes the lady hostage at gunpoint to get what he wants. Meanwhile, the Child is forced by Zucco to lie on the ground and is ordered to "Tais-toi. Ta gueule. Ferme ta bouche. Ferme les yeux. Fais le mort" (62). After a lengthy stand-off, in which Koltès discusses the group of people surrounding Zucco and the hostage, the police finally return with the requested car. Since Zucco's demands have been satisfactorily met, the skirmish has the potential to end peacefully:

Zucco: Je prends la femme avec moi. Ecartez-vous.

Une femme: L'enfant est sauvé. Merci, mon Dieu.

Un homme: Et la femme? Qu'est ce qu'il va lui arriver, à elle? (69)

Yet as Koltès continues with the description of the scene:

Tout le monde s'écarte. Tenant d'une main le pistolet, Zucco se penche, prend la tête de l'enfant par les cheveux, et lui tire une balle dans la nuque. Hurlements, fuite. Tenant le pisolet braqué sur la gorge de la femme, Zucco, dans le parc presque déserté, se dirige vers la voiture. (69)

As has happened before, the murder of the Child seems not to serve any particular purpose in the play. With it, the apparent irrationality of Zucco's criminal mind reaches its peak. Even though there may seem to be no logic behind Zucco's murder or if Zucco himself makes nothing of it, one may still begin to notice under close scrutiny at least the path he is following, if not the full meaning of his crimes. Looking back at his three murders it becomes obvious that Zucco approaches those people with a particular goal in mind, not necessarily their death but, rather, something else in their possession. These people do not fulfill his requests, knowingly in the case of the two women and unknowingly in the case of the detective. In this sense, he collects the indispensable objects for his "new" life out of jail. From his Mother he requires the fatigues that make him "invisible" to the rest, the Detective owns the gun necessary for Zucco's protection and the Lady has a car that gives him means of freedom. Since no one of them would give him the required objects freely and without argument, he simply "puts them away," without harbouring any particular feelings of fear, contempt, or hatred against them. One can say that to some extent all three are responsible for their own fate: with the exclusion of the Detective, since his profession alone marks him as somebody who opposes Zucco per force, whereas women quarrel with, belittle, and denigrate him. As if unaware of the imminent danger, they want to teach him a lesson while standing between him and his objects. As Zucco later calmly confirms this himself, their murder is nothing more than his removing of the obstacles.

As Koltès, on the one hand, keeps piling up Zucco's crimes, he uncovers, on the other, the world and its inhabitants through which Zucco moves. Thus, by portraying the society as it functions from within, Zucco's actions are necessarily put into perspective. It is in the juxtaposition of these two instances that the tension, or conflict, is revealed and also the tragicality of the situation is made palpable. So far it has become obvious that there are two instances opposing each other: Roberto Zucco, for one, who has so far

subjectivity and retains the look towards Antiquity, both the unavoidability as well as irresolvability have to be thoroughly examined.

Unavoidability

First and foremost, the conflict that is tragic cannot be escaped. It must be unavoidable, notwithstanding the hero's activity or passivity. In the traditional scholarship, unavoidability has usually been linked to the action.[57] Today, I would say, this is no longer required. The atrophied subjectivity has had the right to passively contemplate his/her fate already since Hebbel, only that it became even more obvious. It is with no regard to his/her conscious and active doing that the situation unfolds in a certain direction. In antiquity this autonomous development of the situation was blamed on gods and destiny. Today, with an increasing disregard of any kind of transcendence, this no longer seems to be possible. Along this line, what makes a situation unavoidable is not the tragicality of existence since, then, any and every human being should have experienced the same disaster and partaken in the same lot.[58] What leads a situation into its unavoidability is simply an internal "logic" of things, a multitude of possibilities that become singularized into one factuality, the crystallization of infinity in a concrete moment. Consequently, the first condition for a conflict to be called tragic lies in its "contingent necessity," as much as this may sound like an oxymoron. With a lucid premonition, Hegel describes the doings of his contemporary playwrights by stating, "ebensowohl können sie nun auch der gleichen Zufälligkeit der Verwicklungen eine solche Wendung geben, daß sich daraus, sowenig die sonstigen Umstände es auch zu gestatten scheinen, ein glucklicher Ausgang der Verhältnisse und Charaktere herbeiführt" (II: 581). Here lies the problem: even though the events could turn otherwise, no one steps in to solve them and, consequently, they are allowed to take the tragic turn.

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57 Cf. Aristotle's theory of hubris and, consequently, most Attic tragedies.

58 Given the resilience of the traditional position I would like to resurrect it once again. Such is, namely, Jasper's stance through which he explains that "without exception, universal shipwreck is the fundamental characteristic of every existence. This includes accidental misfortune, guilt that is specific and avoidable, and the misery of suffering in vain" (1953, 95).

The situations portrayed in contemporary dramas and tragedies are a far cry from the moral clarity of the ancient plays. In this sense, because of the lack of conscious informed choice or, in other words, given the fact that ancient heroes have not had any doubt with regard to their actions, I would declare that ancient tragedies were less tragic than contemporary plays. As to the clarity of protagonist's situations, all four plays discussed later reveal a quite ambiguous stances of the characters. Contrary to ancient tragedies, the moral authority and righteousness are not even touched upon. In present-day tragic plays, Drakakis and Liebler maintain, "the choices a protagonist makes must be difficult ones between options equally "right'; thus *hamartia*, "missing the mark," is understood not as an optional and avoidable "error" resulting from some inadequacy or "flaw" in the "character" of the protagonist but as something that *happens* in the consequence of the complex situation represented in drama" (9).[59] Today, there should be no question of dignity, honour, pride etc., but only the pure and concrete situation and nothing else. Supportive of this anti-teleological perspective is also Rosenstein who avers that

> "hamartia" [...] is merely an aesthetical device, not an ethical criterion; for in no sense can it justify ethically the consequences of a character's actions, but merely unifies the action from a selected point of view. A character possessing this trait (the "tragic flaw') does not thereby become an ethically "intermediate type of personage" (61).

The traditional scholarship has perceived the issue of the tragic as linked to another essential concept: guilt. Philosophy of tragedy refers to the concept of "tragic guilt." Described by Hegel, it meant for the tragic protagonist to be guilty yet without guilt. Following the philosopher, Lukács, too, writes that "der dramatische Mensch in eine solche Situation hineingestellt ist, aus der in keiner Richtung ein Weg hinausführt, die, was auch geschieht, zur Tragödie führen muß. Seinem Charakter haftet aber im gewissen Maße eine Schuld, die "tragische Schuld" an; von der man sagen könnte, daß er

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59 Just how firmly ingrained has been the traditional view on tragedy is revealed in Miller's quote. He avers that "the flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing [...] but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his

blatantly and ruthlessly shown himself to be soulless criminal without any regard for the human life who remains unapologetic for his crimes.

Now, parallel to the introduction of Zucco's loathsome behaviour, Koltès portrays the other protagonists as representatives of an orderly society, a society the audience has identified with since the beginning. Yet the picture presented is far from an ideal one of an orderly and virtuous community. In the friction between the given appearance and the factual reality of this world a fundamental tension arises. Furthermore, once the belief in the blamelessness of the society is swayed, if not even outrightly lost, then Zucco's situation must be automatically reviewed and evaluated anew. This, in turn, opens up the battlefield of conflict.

From among the other well-behaved citizens, the Girl's family is represented most eloquently. At first, the discrepancies are introduced quite inconspicuously as in the cases of both Father and Mother, which, in turn, grows bolder in the cases of Brother and Sister. At the beginning, after the Girl's first disappearance, when Sister talks to her trying to extract some information out of her, she describes the worries that the Girl's family was subject to, namely "Ton frère est en train de parcourir la ville avec la voiture et je peux te dire que, quand il te retouvera, tu en auras plein les fesses, car il s'est fait une inquietude d'enfer. Ta mère a guetté à la fenêtre pendant des heures en faisant toutes les suppositions du monde, depuis le viol collectif par une bande de voyous jusqu'au corps dépecé qu'on retrouvera dans un bois [...] Et ton père est déjà tellement sûr de ne plus te revoir qu'il s'est saoulé la gueule et qu'il ronfle sur la canapé avec le ronflement du désespoir" (19). This may be seen as a reaction of a relatively normal functional, healthy, loving, perhaps a bit over-protective family but still within the boundaries of interpersonal civility and even familial affection. Yet, as the play develops, the family is reintroduced to the audience. Once the girl has been found and once the situation is not filtered through the Sister's self-preservation mechanisms, we are faced with a slightly different version of reality. The "good" Father, who previously appeared not to be able to withstand the pressure of the potentially bad news, reveals his truer nature in the following terms when speaking to his daughters:

> Votre mère a caché la bière. Je vais la battre comme je le faisais jadis. Pourqoui ai-je arrêté un jour? J'avais le bras fatigué, mais j'aurais dû me

> forcer, faire de l'exercice, le faire faire par quelqu'un d'autre. J'aurais dû continuer comme autrefois: la battre tous les jours, à heures regulières. Mais voilà, j'ai été négligent, et maintenant, elle me cache la bière, et je suis sûr que vous êtes complices (42-3).

Needless to say, the difference speaks for itself. Not only does it seem that the Father's having gotten himself "saoulé la gueule" as well as his "ronflement du désespoir" should not be linked to the Girl's uncertain fate. Rather, they must be linked to his state of constant intoxication. His only concern is not his family but the booze. The Mother, in turn, although a bit less vulgar, also does not spare the girls: "Votre père est encore saoûl. Il s'est enfilé des bières les unes après les autres. Qu'est-ce que vous faites, voues, à être si complaisantes avec ce vieux fou? Vous me laissez me battre toute seule contre cet ivrogne. [...] Vous êtes deux petites sottes qui bavardez, bavardez, vous ne vous occupez que de vos petites histoires idiotes, et vous me laissez seule avec ce poivrot," and further "Si vous en aviez encore l'âge et moi la force, je vous battrais toutes les deux" (43-4). In addition, her fearful staring through the window, her being devoured by worries for the well-being of her youngest daughter do not reveal her true self but the actions provide a powerful reminder that how the world may appear does not necessarily correspond to the reality.

This discrepancy is revealed most strikingly in the younger generation. Among the Brother and the two Sisters one would expect to see a particularly strong bond and sibling love. Once again, what is there manages to fall into ruin. Brother starts off as a caring elder sibling. He at first appears to be overwhelmed with worry and grief, especially under the pressure of the unknown. In such a way he confesses to the Sister that "Rien ne pourrait me fair pleurer, sauf un terrible malheur que serait arrivé à ma petite soeur. Mais j'ai tellement veillé sur elle, et ce soir seulement elle m'a échapée. Quelques heures elle m'a échapeée sur des années et des années où j'ai veillé sur elle. Le malheur a besoin de plus de temps pour s'abattre sur quelqu'un" (22), while further he implores her to "Aide-moi, ma soeur, aide-moi. Tu es plus forte que moi. Je ne supporte pa les malheurs" (23).

Yet once it has been established that "evil" has "harmed" the little Girl, everything changes. As soon as the Girl is vulnerable to the charges, Brother does not hold back. In a lengthy monologue addressing the Girl he reveals his true nature:

> Pourquoi croit-elle que je t'aurais tabassée? Maintenant tu es une femelle; je n'ai jamais tabassée une femelle. J'aime bien les femelles; c'est ce que je préfère.C'est beaucoup mieux qu'une soeur cadette. C'est emmerdant, une soeur cadette. Il faut tout le temps la surveiller, avoir l'oeil sur elle. Pour protéger quoi? Sa virginité? [...] Tout le temps que j'ai passé à veiller sur toi est du temps perdu. Je regrette tout ce temps-là. Je regrette chaque jour, chaque heure perdus à avoir l'oeil sur toi. On devrait déflorer les gamines dès qu'elles sont gamines, comme ça on ficherait la paix aux frères aînés. [...] Eclate-toi, ma vieille, et tout de suite. Lâche-toi dans la nature, va traîner dans le Petit Chicago avec les putes, fais-toi pute: tu gagneras du fric et tu ne seras plus à la charge de personne. Et peut-être que je te rencontrerai dans les bars où ça dragues, je te ferai un petit signe, on sera frangin et frangine de bar; c'est moins emmerdant et on s'amuse beaucoup plus [...] Tu es une femelle et tout le monde s'en fout (32-4).

The only logical step for the Brother is then to let the Girl go, to stop caring for her and to throw her out of the house. The Girl wants to go to Little Chicago and wait there because she is convinced that it is where she will meet Zucco. Yet the Brother, in his violent rejection of the Girl and disappointment with her non-conformity with the "rules of the game," decides to sell her to a Pimp. In a lengthy process of bargaining with the Pimp, Brother's skewed and sick morality is shown: "Ça veut dire qu'on peut discuter, baisser, monter le prix. Moi, j'ai fixé le prix abstraitement parce que ça n'a pas de prix" (72). When the Pimp wavers with regard to the offered price, Brother warns him "mais ne prends pas trop de temps. Il va falloir que je raccompagne ma soeur chez sa mère" (72) and, further down, "Elle te fera gagner assez d'argent pour que tu en oublies le prix" (73). Once the Girl is taken away, Brother dissolves in tears again revealing to Madame that "Ce n'est pas moi qui l'ai voulu, patronne, je vous le jure. [...] Mon poussin, ma petite chérie, je n'ai jamais aimé quelqu'un comme je l'ai aimée. Je n'y peux rien. Le malheur s'est abattu sur nous. C'est elle qui a voulu, je n'ai fait que lui céder. Je

n'ai jamais pu ne pas céder à ma petite soeur. C'est le malheur qui nous a choisi et qui s'acharne sur nous" (75).

Obviously, even though there may be evil outside the society, there is also "evil" inside. It exists within the reach of ordinary citizens, be it in the form of neglect, violence, or even deeds of a similar nature to those committed by serial killers. Yet since there is a reason behind it, be it the Girl's or Brother's wish, it all seems to fit into the scheme of logic and "understanding." Interestingly, this does not sit well with Madame who, as one may presume, has seen all the possible "explicable" evil in society. She is among the very few who can call a spade a spade and simply rebuff Brother with "Tu es une belle ordure" (ibid.).[5] The double standards have thus become clear. Not only is evil something that happens outside the limits of the permitted but also, quite frequently and even more venomously, occurs inside and under the auspices of good citizenly behaviour. The conflict is thus revealed.

The state of such an inner conflict may be even better observed in the case of the Sister. It is her case that makes the immanent discrepancy more clear. If the "brotherly affection" has not been obvious enough, it is the Sister who, being on the same side with the Girl, has been made to endure the same treatment from the members of the family. As a consequence of her not having any real life experience and being "une vièrge prolongée" (40), which is how she is labeled by the Girl, she at the outset fully embraces the "safe haven" offered by the patriarchal males in the family. She acts and speaks as if she fully believes in the appropriateness of "protecting" her from an "idiot comme tous les garçons" who will make her "encore mille fois embrasser par des imbéciles, que tu en aies envie ou pas; et tu te feras mettre la main aux fesses, ma pauvre, que tu le veuilles ou non." They are "des imbéciles et tout ce qu'ils savent faire, c'est de mettre la main aux fesses des gamines. […] Ils n'y peuvent rien. Ils sont fabriqués avec de l'imbécillité" (20). She therefore fully accepts the idea of almost an essential necessity not to let herself "voler ce qui ne doit pas t'être volé avant l'heure" (20-1). Moreover, she accepts being controlled and places herself in the same mechanism to exert control over the weaker ones, "Mais je sais que tu attendras ton heure, que nous choisirons, tous ensemble – ta

mère, ton père, ton frère, moi-même, et toi aussi d'ailleurs – à qui tu le donneras" (21). In a society, where the surface shines with a proper luster the powerless beings are even dispossessed of themselves.

Since in such a circle the oppressor badly needs the oppressed and vice versa, it is obvious then why the Sister is so utterly reluctant to endorse the Girl and is even verbally aggressive towards her. Nevertheless, things changed. The event that took place with Zucco did change the Girl. She has been able to wrest herself from the suffocating "chains of familial affection" despite her older Sister is forbidding her to do so. She is the only one who can muster the necessary amount of courage to break away from the "sweet poison" of familial control because, as she tells the Sister, "Ce sont mes parents, mon frère et ma soeur que j'oublierai et que j'oublie déjà; mais non pas mon malheur" (40). Ironically, it appears as if the "rape" meant the equivalent of a ticket to freedom and to a grown-up free life. With it she decided to shake off the relations which would have necessarily made her similar to her older Sister in whose face she throws that "Tu n'as jamais eu aucun homme. Tu n'as jamais été aimée. Tu es restée toute seule toute la vie, et tu as été très malheureuse" (41). When escaping such life, even the decision to go to Little Chicago seems of great weight, namely, regardless of what the "world" is going to think, it is the Girl herself who is going to take her life into her own hands. She avers that "Je suis malheureuse et je suis heureuse. J'ai beaucoup souffert, mais j'ai pris beaucoup de plaisir à cette souffrance-là" (44). Regardless of whether the decision is going to be "good" or "bad," it is going to be her own. She has finally arrived at the stage when she can decide about her own fate, wherefore she can rebuke her Sister "tu ne sais rien de la vie, tu as bien veillé sur toi, tu t'es bien protégée. Moi, je suis vieille, je suis violée, je suis perdue, je prends mes décisions toute seule" (40).

Once the circle is disrupted, once the pretence is abolished and the truth of mutual relations has been made obvious then the masks on the faces fall off. This is the case too, for example, in the ancient relationship between Antigone and Ismene. Also, it is clear what Brother's "unreserved love" has turned into. It is a similar crumbling of a fake posture maintained only by virtue of the rhythm of the circle, and by way of the

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[5] In English translation this is put more crudely: "You piece of shit" (191).

participants' own incapability to break loose, as seen too in the Sister's case. As soon as the Girl announces she is leaving her home, Sister's entire posture crumbles:

> Pourquoi veux-tu te perdre, colombe innocente? Non, ne m'abondonne pas, ne me laisse pas toute seule. Je ne veux pas rester seule avec ton frère et tes parents. Je ne veux pas rester seule dans cette maison. [...] Ne m'abondonne pas, je t'en supplie, ne m'abondonne pas. Je déteste ton frère, et tes parents, et cette maison (42),

and later

> Et moi je vais mourir si tu m'abondonnes (44).

Thus, the world in which the family at first appears to be of the nicest embodiment later comes to show its true face as that of familial extortion, emotional blackmailing, utilitarian selfishness, and despicable deceit. The tensions arise between the appearance and the factual state of being in the world. Now, if the true values of the reality are so fundamentally different from what it wants to portray, then the question arises as to the valence of the "criminal" side as well under these circumstances. How is it possible to maintain that Zucco is an unrepentant criminal if what he does is to lay bare the true picture of a double-faced world? Does his position remain absolute and therefore worthy of a severe reprimand and complete rejection or can it, after taking into consideration the wrongdoings by others, be regarded from a more benevolent position? Since the examples provided so far pertain only to the worthy, law-abiding citizens, they cannot go further than to indicate Zucco's new position and stop short from validating it fully. In order to receive his more complete picture other cases have to be brought forward and subjected to scrutiny.

The primary and most important, since it links both sides of the argument, is the case of the Girl. Throughout her ordeal with the family, her plight is referred to as an "evil," a "rape," a "tragedy." Within the framework of the entire self-praising worldview that is quite obvious. If the play's presupposition of the world and its society is that they are good and virtuous by definition, then everything that goes against them, must necessarily be acclaimed as evil and corrupt. Moreover, the Girl does not do anything to dispel these presumptions. In fact, she does not even bother to reveal the whole truth to the Parents and the Brother. She seems to prefer to leave them in their self-absorbed

reality. What this suggests is that they would not have been able to understand her desire or, put even more acutely, they might have outrightly rejected her arguments since they need her in order to keep up the appearance and functioning of their vicious circle. Naturally, any revolt against or even escape from it threatens to destroy their illusions and with them their *raison d'être*.

Yet the girl nevertheless reveals the purpose behind her decision to Zucco. Now the man of whom we have been made to think in terms of evil hears her admission: "Toi, mon vieux, tu m'as pris mon pucelage, tu vas le garder. Maintenant, il n'y aura personne d'autre qui pourra me le prendre. Tu l'as jusqu'à la fin de tes jours, tu l'auras même quand tu m'auras oubliée ou que tu seras mort. Tu es marqué par moi comme par une cicatrice après une bagarre. Moi, je ne risque pas d'oublier, puisque je n'en ai pas d'autre à donner à personne; fini, c'est fait, jusqu'à la fin de ma vie. C'est donné et c'est toi qui l'as" (28). The Girl has given it away! This act, most apparently, was not a rape or other kind of violence. Regardless of whether she had been looking for just anybody to have her or she truly felt something for Zucco, it was her conscious deed accomplished with her clear consent on the basis of her own volition.

Zucco does not go about killing like a madman. In addition to the "rape" that has proved not to be a rape, the following two examples should, I hope, bring enough proof that there is a method in Zucco's madness. A particular case in point is the character of the Lady in the park, the one whose son Zucco kills for apparently no specific reason. Yet a closer look at the situation reveals a different state of affairs. The Lady sets a strongly suggestive tone in their communication right from the outset:

La dame: Asseyez-vous à côté de moi. Parlez-moi. Je m'ennuie; on se fera la conversation. Je déteste les jardins publics. Vous avez l'air timide. Est-ce que je vous intimide?

Zucco: Je ne suis pas timide.

La dame: Pourtant, vous avez les mains qui tremblent comme un gamin devant sa première fille. Vous avez une bonne tête. Vous êtes beau gosse. Vous aimez les femmes? Vous êtes presque trop beau gosse pour aimer les femmes. (56)

[...]

Zucco: J'aime toutes les femmes.

La dame: Ça, c'est très bien. Avez-vous déjà été dur avec une femme?

Zucco: Jamais.

La dame: Mais l'envie? vous avez déjà dû avoir l'envie d'être violent avec une femme, n'est-ce pas? Cette envie-là, tous les hommes l'ont eue un jour; tous.

Zucco: Pas moi. Je suis doux et pacifique (57).

It is the Lady who invites Zucco to join her on the bench and engages in a rather open discussion. Although the encounter appears to be a promising one, she cannot hide her obvious disappointment at Zucco's declaration of character leniency and gentleness. It is quite clear that she wants to provoke Zucco to an outrageous act, such as an intercourse of a violent nature with a complete stranger in the middle of the day in a park. She wants to live dangerously, so, in order to have an "exciting" existence, she should be the one to be exposed to Zucco's violence. Oddly, this does not happen and for some reason Zucco spares her. His reason appears to be hidden in her admission, namely: "Tirez donc, imbécile. Je ne vous donnerai pas les clés, ne serait-ce que parce que vous me prenez pour une idiote. Mon mari me prend pour une idiote, mon fils me prend pour une idiote, la bonne me prend pour une idiote – vous pouvez tirer, ça fera une idiote de moins" (59). What surfaces in this fiery statement is a despondent realization of her constantly being taken advantage of by the world and forced to live in a "golden cage." As somebody who is not capable to fit in or, better still, who is held at the periphery of her microcosm and who is perfectly aware of this condition, she strikes a chord very similar to Zucco's own. She fits in amongst those poor existences who are being constantly belittled or simply outright rejected.

It is for this reason that Zucco does not murder her but her son. On the basis of the closeness of their experiences he considers her almost an ally, so when she describes the boy as "un petit morveux" (58), his decision seems to be all but made and effectively the die is cast. Thus, by killing him, Zucco expects to do great favour to her. Obviously, this was not the case. Her somewhat humiliating relation to the child reflects, from her perspective, only her son's real neglect of her. By making her contempt known she thinks she can pay her child back. However, her relationship to her son is precisely what

distinguishes her from Zucco: "je détestais tout sauf les petits morveux" (80) and, further along, also confesses, "Je n'ai plus rien à moi, maintenant. N'importe qui marche dans la seule chose qui m'appartenait. Cela va être nettoyé demain matin par les jardiniers. Qu'est-ce qui me reste, maintenant, qu'est-ce qui me reste?" (81). Her son was the only thing that made her endure the contempt of the world, despite her deprecating attitude toward him. The Lady and the boy are entrapped in the neglect of the world.

The significance of such parallel experiences can be perhaps even more clearly seen in the scene with the Old Gentleman who remains locked in with Zucco throughout the night on the platform of the underground metro station. As the Old Gentleman confesses,

> Je me réjouissais d'avoir attrapé le dernier métro lorsque soudain [...] je n'ai plus reconnu ma station [...] J'ignorais cependant qu'elle cachait, derrière le parcours limpide que je pratique tous les jours, un monde obscur de tunnels, de directions inconnues, que j'aurais préféré ignorer mais que ma sotte distraction m'a forcé de connaître. [...] alors me voici ici [...] puni de ma distraction et de la lenteur de mon pas [...] Sans doute le petit matin, oui, sans doute est-ce cela que j'attends dans cette station qui m'était aussi familière que ma cuisine, et qui me fait peur maintenant (34-5).

The Old Gentleman has lost his place, leading to his sense of loss of security and becoming a victim of the unknown. His own perspective changed and the world, previously so obvious and easy to grasp, became dark, unfriendly, and terrifying. Koltès makes here a very important point: once things get out of joint, or torn apart they can never be mended again. Once one has become an outcast, Zucco being, of course, the main example, it is impossible to return, be it because of the world's rejection, be it because of one's own incapacity to fit in again. These people are thus forced to the margins. They cannot fully bask under the warm sun of the society, yet are still connected with it, even if only on the basis of their memories and previous allegiances. Koltès makes it very clear that nobody is immune from such a realization. This is affirmed by the Old Gentleman who states "Moi qui suis un vieil homme, moi qui croyais connaître le monde et la vie aussi bien que ma cuisine, patatras, me voici hors du monde" (38). The tragic in this situation is enhanced by its irreversibility and irresolvability. The fear and

the panic remain planted in the hearts and souls of such outcasts, while these feelings in fact start running their lives. The Old Gentleman confesses: "Et je ne sais rien maintenant de ce qui va se passer, de la manière dont je verrai le monde et dont le monde me verra ou ne me verra pas. Car je ne saurai plus ce qui est le jour et ce qui est la nuit, je ne saurai plus quoi faire, je vais tourner dans ma cuisine à le recherche de l'heure et tout cela me fait bien peur" (38-9). Thankfully, he can rely on Roberto Zucco for help. And Zucco does not disappoint him. After the long night's talk, Zucco "*aide le vieux monsieur à se lever et l'accompagne. Le premier métro passe*" (168). Interestingly, he can offer help to others, yet he himself does not have anybody to rely upon. His is a totally forlorn existence that he cannot explain. The world's rejection is terminal.

What emerges suddenly, I think, is a completely different, in fact, diametrically opposing picture. On the one hand, the world, with which the audience agreed to share the value system almost automatically, unveiled itself as a skewed and morally corrupt one. Its ethically grounded presence becomes an extremely doubtful one at best. Particularly in light of some new revelations with regard to Zucco who now appears to negate his straightforward classification as an embodiment of evil or of forces of darkness but, rather, in a significantly more moderate way as an emotional, sensitive, decisive human being. How then, is the audience to perceive Zucco?

These traits vouch for Zucco's ability to essentially belong to the kind of subjectivity that was, after its inception with the surge of Christianity and the development of its aesthetic foundations during the Renaissance, so aptly defined in German Idealism. There it was initiated by Kant and his Copernican turn by instituting subjective rationality as the one and only tool of cognition. This, in turn, caused the epistemological turn so that the known reality was understood as theoretically and empirically dependent on the subject and his/her perspective. This hermeneutic twist signified another step in the lessening of the real world's importance and the augmentation of the significance of the human mind. As Zima asserts, in Kant's thought "das individuelle Subjekt der Philosophie bedarf keiner transzendenten Instanz mehr, um fundierte und unbezweifelbare Aussagen machen zu können" (2000, 98). With the subject well-established as the source and condition of its own cognition, the gnoseological process became self-centred and "critical.'

Whether Zucco can correspond with the Hegelian subjectivity and be, together with the world, subsumed under the same overarching principle should be investigated. In order to establish that, since the priorities of the society are known, Zucco's character will be investigated according to Hegelian parameters.

Zucco in principle rejects existences such as those of the Father and Brother, where the seeming façade of appropriateness in the family is maintained only through emotional blackmailing and/or sheer physical force, or such as that of the Lady where her only reason to accept her son is her disliking him the least. Zucco's constantly repeated ardent desire to be invisible may thus be one of the ways of staying true to himself, to his own sensibility, that is, to his staying normal. As he describes this to the Old Gentleman, with reference to another well established place in society, the university, where "invisibility" is in high demand, namely "Je vous jure qu'il faut être un bon élève, discret et invisible, pour être à la Sorbonne. Ce n'est pas une de ces universités de banlieue où sont les voyous et ceux qui se prennent pour des héros" (37).

He claims that he has "toujours pensé que la meilleure manière de vivre tranquille était d'être aussi transparent qu'une vitre, comme un caméléon sur la pierre, passer à travers les murs, n'avoir ni couleur ni odeur; que le regard des gens vous traverse et voie les gens derrière vous, comme si vous n'étiez pas là" (36). Zucco desires a complete transparency and through that a total anonymity. He does not want to have any relationship with the world because he does not want to belong to the society as he knows it. He does not want to be the same as everybody else who boasts about love and brags about compassion, yet in the next moment tramples over everybody else in order to satisfy his/her selfish urges and egotistic desires. He loathes the double-faced and snake-tongued human race, and rejects its heroes.

In a regular, normal world everybody wants to be a hero, and societies need, praise and commend them. To heroes go the spoils of war, they are hailed as truly valuable and worthy men and women. They are the cohesive material of society since their examples lead the way for other citizens. One more reason for Zucco to stay out of reach of the power relations is in the following conclusion. As he explains to the Old Gentleman, "Je ne suis pas un héros. Les héros sont des criminels. Il n'y a pas de héros dont les habits ne soient trempés de sang, et le sang est la seule chose au monde qui ne

puisse pas passer inaperçue. C'est la chose la plus visible du monde. Quand tout sera détruit, qu'un brouillard de fin du monde recouvrira la terre, il restera toujours les habits trempés de sang des heros" (37). Understandably, this attitude ought to be rejected in order for people to be able to cherish a fellow human being. Heroic behaviour and their über-human, frequently bloody actions blind our view for the rest of humanity, which cannot follow the example and cares less for heroic deeds. They are the people pushed to the margins of society, and they are the ones who pay the price for the heroic deeds of the others.

In Hegelian terms, the subjectivity of the truly great tragic characters consists of their immobile pathos, which in turn is defined on the basis of their goals. The above passages have only hinted at what Zucco's ultimate goal might be. He reveals it in a lengthy monologue, the only one in the play were his intentions are revealed. In a scene in Little Chicago, during which Zucco gets repeatedly beaten by the Bruiser with whom he tries to fight, he ends up in a phone booth, picking up a dead receiver and making the following speech:

> Je veux partir. Il faut partir tout de suite. Il fait trop chaud, dans cette putain de ville. Je veux aller en Afrique, sous la neige. Il faut que je parte parce que je vais mourir. De toute façon, personne ne s'interesse à personne. Les hommes ont besoin des femmes et les femmes ont besoin des hommes. Mais de l'amour, il n'y en a pas. [...] J'aimerais renaître chien, pour être moins malheureux. J'aimerais être un chien jaune, bouffé par la gale, dont on s'écarterait sans faire attention. J'aimerais être un fouilleur de poubelles pour l'éternité. Je crois qu'il n'y a pas de mots, il n'y a rien à dire. Il faut arrêter d'enseigner les mots. Il faut fermer les écoles et agrandir les cimetières. De toute façon, un an, cent ans, c'est pareil; tôt ou tard, on doit tous mourir, tous. Et ça, ça fait chanter les oiseaux, ça fait rire les oiseaux (48-9).

Zucco's goal and, in a tragic manner, also the substance of his individuality appears to be yearning for affection and love. Since the world is as it is, it is nearly impossible for both emotions to be reached. Not only are they inaccessible but, moreover, they simply do not exist with perhaps the exception of the Girl's affection. Zucco thus

sets out on a solitary quest for these emotions, as it becomes obvious. Where it is not possible to continue on his path and he runs into an obstacle he uses force, as in the cases of his Mother, Sergeant, even the Child. And where he sees other human beings in distress, he is more than willing to offer them a kind and supportive hand, as in the cases of the Girl, Lady and the Old Gentleman.

What this shows is Zucco's character's complete integration of his goals and his resolution to reach his aims. He knows no other option but to stay on that track despite the obstacles and the measures taken in order to eliminate them. This is a true tragic subjectivity. Even though Hegel views the ontological basis of a tragic hero differently from Aristotle, he still conforms with Aristotle with regard to its content. The tragic character, his/her essential characteristics notwithstanding, remains very much a total entity. Namely, the relation between the hero's character and his/her actions is and should be, it is here that Hegel follows Aristotle, absolute. These tragic characters are one and the same with their "program," the pathos. Hegel defines them as "feste Figuren, die nur das sind, was sie sind, ohne Kollision in sich selbst, ohne schwankendes Anerkennen eines anderen Pathos und insofern [...] hohe, absolut bestimmte Charaktere, deren Bestimmtheit jedoch in einer besonderen sittlichen Macht ihren Inhalt und Grund findet" (II: 561). And later also admits that the "fester, starker Charakter aber ist eins mit seinem wesentlichen Pathos" (II: 566). Furthermore, their pathos cannot be deliberately chosen. It is not in the power of the subject to discard or assume it. If in antiquity gods burdened the heros with such tasks, modern characters choose their goals themselves. Yet the way these goals are chosen does not change their importance and the heroes' adherence to them. What Hegel used for romantic characters can therefore be easily used too for Zucco: "Sie sind das, was sie sind, und ewig dies, und das ist ihre Größe" (II: 566). This condition is necessary for the tragic character to take a stand and follow his/her subjectively defined path to the bitter end. Therefore, there is nothing left over as a result of the character's embodiment in action. In other words, all character-traits enter into the subject's actions, or better still, what he/she does is what he/she is.

As we have seen, in a true tragedy "to be" equals completely with "to act." Therefore, tragic heroes "sind durchaus das, was sie ihrem Begriff gemäß sein können und müßen [...] doch nur die *eine* Macht dieses bestimmten Charakters" (II: 548).

Obviously, the character cannot but put forward this pathos in his/her actions. If the character is defined by pathos, and the pathos means the one-sidedness of his/her ideas, plans and goals, then the only way of revealing the true subjectivity of the character is through translating it into actions. Zucco mirrors this attitude repeatedly. At some point he avers, "Je suis comme un train qui traverse tranquillement une prairie et que rien ne pourrait faire dérailler. Je suis comme un hippopotame enfoncé dans la vase et qui se déplace très lentement et que rien ne pourrait détourner du chemin ni du rhytme qu'il a décidé de prendre" (38). He knows his goal. In fact, he is himself this goal and its embodiment. Regrettably, he cannot leave this track even if he truly wanted.

In the above cited monologue, Zucco reveals part of his longing. For the most part, his desires are made obvious *per negationem*. Instead of claiming what he wants, he says rather what he does not want. Thus, he does not want to live in a world where "personne ne s'intéresse à personne," where, while talking "de l'amour, il n'y an a pas." Only then does it become clear to him that he wants to be "moins malheureux" (48). All three elements are essential in the understanding of Zucco's character. Now, what makes a dramatic character a true tragic subject, according to Hegel, is his "sittliche Berechtigung zu einer bestimmten Tat" (II: 564). What this "bestimmte Tat" is shall be left for a later discussion. For now, let us explore its condition, that is the "moral right." Zucco rejects the world in which people live estranged lives, where they do not care about each other, and in which love is only a word to cover up for solipsist needs. Although these values may be seen as a subjective whimsicality they also contain a general trait proper to the entirety of humanity. It is true that humanity *per se* cannot be happy unless all of its members are. This, then, seems to be a common objective, so much so that it may be, in my opinion, claimed to be universal.

Furthermore, in addition to being accepted by any and all members of society, the content of these aspirations has to be "ein für alle Zeiten gültiger Inhalt, dessen Darstellung daher aller nationalen Unterschiedenheit zum Trotz auch unsere menschliche und künstlerische Teilnahme gleich rege erhält" (Hegel II: 565). In other words, these ideals should reach across space as well as across time. Zucco's ambition is the same as that of any single person as a member of society. They all, each for oneself, strive for love and affection and use all the ruses in order to gain somebody else's devotion. Thus it

is not wrong to maintain that striving for happiness, as Zucco does, represents one of the most basic aims of the entire humanity across the ages. This conclusion only underscores the Hegelian remark that such a justification or, moral right, "muß an und für sich wesentlich sein" (II: 564). Happiness namely, in addition to being desired by everybody at all ages, is also a value in itself. Even without being so broadly accepted, it would still represent a classical ideal that ancient Greeks called *eudaimonia*. In itself, well-being is a positive, essential value because it relates to all other significant ideals. Put differently, well-being cannot be reached unless it results from all the other values, such as goodness, truth, and beauty. These made it most desirable since antiquity and it has remained so. Hegel, when discussing romantic subjectivity, confirms this by stating that it is "das Recht der Subjektivität als solcher, die sich als alleiniger Inhalt feststellt und nun die Liebe, die persönliche Ehre usf. [...] als ausschließlichen Zweck ergreift" (II: 574).

If the values Zucco's actions reveal through yearning, that is happiness, love and affection cannot be disputed in themselves, the next step should be to judge the means he has chosen in order to forward his agenda and reach them. As we have seen, actions stand for a dramatic character, they bring to life his/her subjectivity. In Zucco's case, his actions are generally abominable and unacceptable. Yet at a closer look, Zucco's actions are, in fact, quite different from what they have been branded by his opponents. This is, of course, not to say that a killing is not a nefarious offence. What remains to be seen is his own perspective on his deeds. Only then, by the juxtaposition of these possibly disagreeing attitudes, the basis of the tragic situation will become apparent. Zucco's perspective on himself is that of "un garçon normal et raisonnable" (36). Koltès proved the correctness of his stance by giving the detailed examples of the members of society. In a lengthy speech to the Lady, he reveals his view on society:

> Regardez tous ces fous. Regarderz comme ils ont l'air méchant. Ce sont des tueurs. Je n'ai jamais vu autant de tueurs en même temps. Au moindre signal dans leur tête, ils se mettraient à se tuer entre eux. Je me demande pourquoi le signal ne se déclenche pas, là, maintenant, dans leur tête. Parce qu'ils sont tous prêts à tuer. Ils sont comme des rats dans les cages des laboratoires. Ils ont envie de tuer, ça se voit à leur visage, ça se voit à leur démarche; je vois leurs poings serrés dans leurs poches. Moi, je reconnais

> un tueur au premier coup d'oeil; ils ont les habits pleins de sang. Ici, il y en a partout; il faut se tenir tranquille, sans bouger; il ne faut pas les regarder dans les yeux. Il ne faut pas qu'ils nous voient; il faut être transparent. Parce que sinon, si on les regarde dans les yeux, s'ils s'apperçoivent qu'on les regarde, s'ils se mettent à nous regarder et à nous voir, le signal se déclenche dans leur tete et ils tuent, ils tuent. Et s'il y en a un qui commence, tout le monde ici va tuer tout le monde. Tout le monde n'attend que le signal dans la tête (79-80).

Consequently, regular people are murderers as well. They are murderers in their hearts, destroying in search for their own solipsist "happiness." Although they do not destroy physical lives, they retain the existence that ruins the life. The most blatant of the cases may be that of the Girl and her being sold by her family. The very problem that Zucco defined as acts of evil. People are evil and what they do under the cover of social cohabitation is to keep each other in check. This is confirmed by one of the two Officers at the beginning of the play,

> Moi qui suis gardien depuis six années, j'ai toujours regardé les meurtriers en cherchant où pouvait se trouver ce qui les différenciait de moi, gardien de prison, incapable de poignarder ni d'étrangler, incapable même d'en avoir l'idée. J'ai réfléchi, j'ai cherché, je las ai même regardés sous la douche, parce qu'on m'a dit que c'était dans le sexe que se logeait l'instinct meurtrier. J'en ai vu plus de six cents, eh bien, aucun point commun entre eux; il y an a des gros, il y en a des petits, il y en a des minces, il y en a des tout petits, il y en a des ronds, il y en a des pointus, il y en a des énormes, il n'y a rien à tirer de cela (11).

There is no difference between killers and "regular" people except for the fact that the latter do not destroy the physical existence. To have a life ruined and to live with that might be, in some cases, even more difficult to put up with. And so also the world is a bad place, bursting with misery, domestic violence, drunkenness, familial cruelty, and impotent hatred. It is the society that lacks ideals and lacks the true values regardless of whether its members commit the final act of taking a life or not.

It has already become clear that both sides, Zucco's and the world's, are in fact the opposite of what they initially appear. Society, in the first instance appearing good and philanthropist, ends up showing its corrupt and utterly despicable side, and Zucco, considered at the beginning a heartless and dull killer, ends up showing his idealist side together with a considerable amount of empathy. There exists a pattern of similarity between all three "survivors" of the encounters with Zucco: the Girl, the Lady, and the Old Gentleman. They all have been thrust aside by the society, and have consequently, like Zucco, become outcasts, the underdogs of destiny. Contrary to what has been presumed about Zucco, he behaves in an unexpectedly courteous manner, by not hurting those who have already been hurt. Furthermore, Zucco does not kill with the intention of killing on his mind. He does so because he does not see any other way around the obstructions he has encountered. Things simply lead to each other, which is why he finds himself in a position of a killer. There is no special plan of destruction behind his actions. The only thing he sees is the final goal of either finding love or escaping the place. In this sense, he is simply removing the obstacles. Zucco's total disinterest in the murder itself is well evidenced in the following words of the "panic-stricken Prostitute" to the Madam:

> La Pute: Madame, madame, des forces diaboliques viennent de traverser le Petit Chicago. Tout le quartier est troublé, les putes ne travaillent plus, les macs restent la bouche ouverte [...] Madame, vous avez abrité le démon dans votre maison. [...] Il est de plus en plus près du dos courbé de l'inspecteur, et brusquement, il sort un long poignard d'une poche de son habit, et le plante dans le dos du pauvre homme. [...] Ni le meurtrier ni sa victime ne se sont à aucun moment regardés. Le garçon avait les yeux fixés sur le revolver de l'inspecteur; il se penche, le prend, le met dans sa poche, et il s'en va, tranquillement, avec la tranquillité du démon [...] C'était le diable (30-1).

Clearly these two stances oppose each other and their confrontation fans the flames of the conflict. Both stances are correct in certain parts of their paradigms. Zucco in his desire for affection and happiness, and also the society by maintaining the

untouchability of physical existence. Zucco is placed in opposition to the world by his firm resolution to follow through on his goals. With Hegel's words, it is a typically tragic situation, in which "ein durch den Gehalt seines Zwecks berechtigter Entschluß [...] verletzt unter bestimmten Umständen [...] ein anderes, gleich sittliches Gebiet menschlichen Wollens" (II: 564). What appears to be the case are the double standards for the same or, at least, similar actions that are regarded differently with respect to their general or subjective application. In romantic tragedies subjects are not led by absolute values that are legitimate even if they oppose the legal powers that be. In Hegel's contemporary tragedy "der eigentümliche Charakter als solcher [...] sich nach subjektiven Wünschen und Bedürfnissen, äußeren Einflüssen usf. entscheidet" (II: 576). There is no dispute that Zucco's goals are subjective. Yet at the same time, it is evident that his goals are the same as those of the entire humanity. The only difference with those from antiquity is that those ones have been imposed from above, such as godly laws and eternally sacred rules, whereas here the goals have been based on every single person's ultimate desires. Hegel acknowledges, but disproves, of the ultimate tragicality of such situation, namely, "Hier *kann* deshalb wohl die Sittlichkeit des Zwecks und der Charakter zusammenfallen, diese Kongruenz aber macht der Partikularisation der Zwecke, Leidenschaften und subjektiven Innerlichkeit wegen nicht die *wesentliche* Grundlage und objektive Bedingung der tragischen Tiefe und Schönheit aus" (II: 576). For the philosopher, even if both goals fall together in their moral or ethical justification, it is only a contingent condition of the tragic and, therefore, not immanently absolute, substantial necessity. In the "modern" tragedy, according to Hegel, both tragic depth and beauty may appear not as a consequence of a worldview but, rather, as an outcome of a subjective vision.

Zucco is a truly modern character in the sense that his contingent of values does not rest on an eschatological set of ideals. On the contrary, his value system is based on the set of his own particular desires. These desires are, and this is extremely important, applicable to, and acceptable by, the entire humanity. These desires may be therefore seen as grounded not on an abstract but on a concrete *eudaimonia*, while still being understood as an objective set of values. It is because of these objective values that Zucco's character shows striking similarities with the ancient tragic characters. In both

periods the carriers of these values were individual human beings. This subjective counterpoint, the interplay between the "public" (objective) and the "private" (subjective), have always formed the hub of tragedy since its inception. Therefore, significant parallels may be drawn, for example, between *Roberto Zucco* and *Antigone*. Even though she seems to be struggling for a much more peaceful goal, namely the right to bury her fallen brother, and not, as in Zucco's case, to murder people, the fundamental pattern on which the conflict occurs is the same. In both cases, their ideals are the "wesentliche Grundlage" of their subjectivities and "keine bloß personifizierte Interessen" (Hegel II: 532).

It is at this point that the similarities between the ancient characters and Zucco may be fully grasped. Zucco corresponds to all the main requirements Hegel asks for in a true tragic subject. In the first place, Zucco does not represent a split modern subjectivity. He does not reflect on his ideals of happiness and affection, but rather lives them as if they were part of his being. They do not give an impression of being acquired but they seem to construe his essence, his subjectivity. In this sense, his goal truly makes out his subject, namely it should be understood "als Substanz seiner eigenen Individualität" (II: 566). This essence, its seeming solipsism notwithstanding, reveals its humaneness because it can be applied to any time and to any person. Human happiness is the first and foremost desire of any and all of us. Furthermore, by carrying out his aim, Zucco shows or showed absolutely no indecision or inconclusiveness. He does not even seem to know what irresolution means because in his mind there exists absolutely no other alternative but his own train of thought. In fact, the entire play is only a path on the way to reach his goals, merely leading him from one action to another. Zucco's "bad" deeds are interlaced with the acts of compassion and understanding, thus successfully proving that it is not killing that is on his mind but a completely different, more sophisticated goal. Still, this goal is absolute. He cannot veer off this path, even if it equals his death. This, in turn, brings up another essential similarity with the ancient heroes. It makes him similar to those characters in terms of their guilt. Zucco is similarly to ancient heroes, "ebenso schuldig als unschuldig" (II: 565), which is, according to Hegel, the key characteristic of a tragic subject.

Although containing many a trait of ancient hero, Zucco's character still belongs to the realm of the contemporary ones. As a "modern" character, Zucco appears to be similar to ancient tragic heroes by being at the same time both public and private, abstract and concrete, exemplary and living. On the basis of what has been said it is obvious that to accuse Hegel of any lack of sensibility towards his contemporary dramatic art is not a fair conclusion. Clearly, he acknowledged his present-day dramas as tragedies and allowed for an autonomous action of the tragic subject. Hegel imposed on characters in his contemporary romantic tragedy their particularity and singularity on the one hand, and the wholeness of themselves on the other. The propelling force behind modern characters is not "das Substantielle ihres Zwecks, um dessentwillen die Individuen handeln und was sich als das Treibende in ihrer Leidenschaft bewährt, sondern die Subjektivität ihres Herzens und Gemüts oder die Besonderheit ihres Charakters dringt auf Befriedigung" (Hegel II: 575).

Only at this point is it possible to perceive and prove the shift in the comprehension of character that took place. The communal role of dramatic characters in ancient Greek society as well as in their social function as carriers of transcendental values has been, particularly in contemporary scholarship, described as blatantly public.[6] Zucco, too, engages in this public arena. The term in the first place as presented in the tragedies implies a firm and engaging relationship between the hero and his/her society. The ancient society envelops the dramatic protagonist and reveals itself, as I have tried to demonstrate, by making him/her embody its values. If the hero's main characteristic is his/her public quality, he/she is placed on the same level as his/her adversary. Additionally, their fundamental sameness and their equality in the community are acknowledged. Furthermore, it means that he/she is the carrier of publicly acknowledged and observed ideals, which are supported by the Attic all-inclusive society.[7]

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6 It is also Drakakis's and Liebler's opinion that "the *public/private* binary has to a very considerable extent dominated much modern thinking about tragedy" (7).

7 This shift can, in art, also be seen as the shift in genre paradigms. If the fundamental genres of the antiquity were tragedy and epic, then with the "privatization" of those spheres and, consequently, the transformation of the individual into subject, the main genre became the novel. With regard to this topic cf. particularly Lukács's *The Theory of the Novel* and Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (translated into French as *Esthétique et théorie du roman*), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, *Rabelais and his world*.

The *mýthos* of a tragedy was never intended to be an example of personal suffering but, contrary, a matter of great weight for the community. Since individuals carried entire sets of societal values and embodied the destinies of entire cities, even states, their fate is the fate of everybody. Thus, a circle is formed: by virtue of the communal character of the ancient society as by the communal character of Zucco's values and fundamental aims, all heroes should be considered with regard to their public roles. It is the amalgamation of their personal principles that totally coincide with public teleology. As Hegel describes it, it is "der Hauptgegensatz [...] ist der des *Staats*, des sittlichen Lebens in seiner geistigen Allgemeinheit, und der *Familie* als der natürlichen Sittlichkeit. Dies sind die reinsten Mächte der tragischen Darstellung" (II: 564).

It is obvious that Zucco fits very well into both realms. On the one hand he is a "private" citizen, following in fact his personal, that is familial, natural morality. He is "private" of such a kind to which Oedipus or Antigone could never have belonged yet, on the other hand, he still retains the public functionality and belongs to the realm of public laws.[8] This is the locus where the conflict occurs. By virtue of his dual nature he equally belongs to both realms and since he oversteps the borders he has to be marginalized and destroyed. His "sin" appears in having taken his destiny into his own hands, which meant doing so necessarily against society. Although his own goals were generally ethical, such as wanting happiness for an individual, his fault was in using a set of particular means to achieve them. Furthermore, he was only concerned with himself and not for a generally enhanced happiness for all. A parallel with Antigone is striking: she, too, used a general law given by gods against the legal powers, thus taking advantage of the law for her personal belief. The society, represented of course by Creon, could not allow that since it would mean privileging one person over another. Thus, in *Roberto Zucco*, as in *Antigone*, substantial goals were linked with subjective means, bringing both into an irresolvable conflict. Therefore, because such an individual stood up against the all-encompassing

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[8] This issue has been noted also in Elias's writing. Bruder writes that "Elias erklärt das damit, daß "offenbar kein Bedürfnis nach einem solchen Begriff für moderne "Ich-Identität" bestanden" habe, "die Gruppenidentität des einzelnen Menschen" habe "in der gesellschaftlichen Praxis der antiken Welt [...] noch eine viel zu große Rolle" gespielt" (38).

laws of society, he/she has to be declared non-accountable. This may be seen in the words of the 1st Officer who states that "Un tueur est fou par définition" (87).

People who choose to reach their goals of power, importance and control despite and against the society generally do not choose their means. Sometimes these means are more and at other times less metaphorically clad, sometimes these people act behind the back and sometimes they act straightforwardly. The world and society as the form of human cohabitation are based on the premise of general equality, therefore, since happiness and affection cannot be given to everybody, nobody should attain them at the expense of others. This egalitarian principle keeps all human beings equally happy or, better still, unhappy. In this vein, any single-handed attempt at breaking away and accessing those values necessarily has to be branded as absurd and ludicrous.[9] In Zucco's case his acts are committed with a solipsist purpose in mind, without a contentious slogan under the banner of which scores of followers can assemble. Such attempts are branded as "evil" and immediately persecuted. In different societies different degrees of individual freedom are allowed in order to reach personal happiness, yet most strictly banish attempts on human life. Nevertheless, these standards change in the cases of these societies themselves. "Murders" have been allowed only if they were committed for the "benefit" of a particular society, that is, with a particular goal that pretended to justify such actions. Countless wars are an ideal example. Conversely, if a murder is committed by an individual and, moreover, for his/her personal goal, regardless of how generally accepted and humanly righteous his ideals may be, it is judged as the gravest of all possible offences. The double standards, which Koltès seems to draw our attention to, do not seem to be just a figment of our imagination.

The above realization is of seminal importance for the tragic nature of Zucco's character, which is, very much in the same vein as with the ancient heroes, guilty and not guilty at the same time. His "hubris" is in having taken the liberty to take other people's

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9 Yet there are heros accepted in society. They are needed to function as a model, an ideal paradigm for the functioning of the society. Therefore, many heroes are allowed to commit their acts with the full support and blessing of the society, because the masses are made to believe that there is a "purpose" behind them. Ideals and "fighting" for them seem to justify any action. Such were the cases in the communist regimes of, for example, "socialist heroes of work", as well as in the great victorious warriors throughout time and place.

lives, the power that has always been the domain of gods. He overstepped the line and that makes him subject to justifiable repercussions. Zucco cannot live in the world without accepting its general omnivalent rules. At the end, this becomes obvious to him too. He does not negate his involvement, similar again to the Hegelian description of great heros "Es ist die Ehre der großen Charaktere, schuldig zu sein" (II: 566). When Zucco is, after the Girl has recognized him in Little Chicago, recaptured by the two Officers, he sees no point in hiding that "Je suis le meurtrier de mon père, de ma mère, d'un inspecteur de police et d'un enfant. Je suis un tueur" (89). Thus the two worlds and the perspectives meet with, of course, the communal one prevailing. Zucco is a threat therefore he has to be put in jail if not altogether eliminated.

According to Hegel, resolutions of both ancient as well as romantic tragedies lead to annihilation of contradicting forms of one and only substantiality and, therefore, to "die ungestörte innere Harmonie" (II: 566). This, in turn, would ultimately negate the fundamental essence of the tragic. A final reconciliation would mean that one of the sides has backed down and accepted the arguments of the other. Tragedies about Oedipus may be such cases but not *Antigone* or *Medea*, for that matter. With the forceful death of a protagonist the conflict between him/her and the society or the powers that be is not resolved but simply eliminated. The protagonists are put to death, or choose it for themselves precisely because they do not want to abandon the ideals they stood and fought for. If they should remain alive, so should the tragic conflict or, better still, the gist of the tragic situation, which is its irresolvability. So it is also in Zucco's case. He cannot let himself be jailed and, in his view, humiliated. His ideals are too important for him to let them simply slip away. Moreover, he cannot do that because his ideals are generally acceptable to society, if not even absolute. In its essence, his is not a solipsist, egotist quest. His goals seem to have been imposed on him from a higher, deeper force. This may be an additional reason for the argument that Zucco is a truly tragic hero. According to Hegel, in romantic tragedy "die Individuen an einer vorhandenen Macht, der zum Trotz sie ihren besonderen Zweck ausführen wollen, zerschellen" (II: 580). This is exactly what happens to Zucco. Yet because of his essence that surfaces in his pathos, that is in the commitment to his goal, he cannot but follow his fate to the end. Therefore Zucco escapes for the second time. It is for this reason that the voices following his

escape identify him "comme les héros" (90) who "se fout de la gueule de tout le monde" (91), a "Goliath," and a "Samson," or as "un truand marseillais" (93). Yet Zucco does not care about how he is perceived. He never has. All he has in mind is to reach his goal, which he states to the voices at the prison, "Par le haut. Il ne faut pas chercher à traverser les murs, parce que, au-delà des murs, il y a d'autres murs, il y a toujours la prison. Il faut s'échapper par les toits, vers le soleil. On ne mettra jamais un mur entre le soleil et la terre" (92).

Because there can be no real reconciliation in tragedy, one of the sides has to be eliminated. Consequently, Zucco has to follow the path of Antigone. Contrary to Hegel, no "ewige Gerechtigkeit" (II: 580) is therefore possible. If these tragic characters cannot follow the path their pathos dictated to them, their only remaining alternative is death. Antigone hangs herself in her cell, whereas the last thing we hear of Zucco's fate is spoken be one of the voices that "Il tombe!"

5.2 Sharon Pollock, *Doc*

Characterized by Malcolm Page as a "committed playwright" (Salter xi), Sharon Pollock brings into her plays an engaged, even ideologically charged view of reality. Her plays, as she herself has stated more than once, should not leave the spectators equanimous and unperturbed. Life is politics and has to be recognized as such. She has led her life as if it were theatre and vice versa. Engaged professionally as cultural activist and artistic director, Pollock showed a great deal of interest for theatre as a means of commenting on every-day existence. This is exactly also where *Doc*, written in 1984, fits in. It belongs to the group of her later playsm that "treat her subjects and her audience much more respectfully" (ibid.), implying that the thesis of the play is less obvious and leaves some recognition work of its own to the audience. In other words, her works, by referring and pertaining to a very concrete existence, undoubtedly offer a sustained challenge to all who want to engage with the text. Sharon Pollock is also a recipient of the Governor General Awards in the years 1981 and 1986.

With regard to the traditional dramatic form, *Doc* seems to evade all classical rules. Formally it would be very difficult to claim that this play fits the traditional scheme of tragedy since its action is predominantly set to revolve around the past and it includes more than one protagonist.[10] Yet it is not only the brilliantly laid-out structure that vouches for the play's belonging to the genre but the play's relationships among the protagonists. In the discussion of this play, here too, the categories set in the previous chapter, the unavoidability and irresolvability of the conflictual situation, become transparent. The question under scrutiny is whether it is possible to maintain a tragic bend of a dramatic work without observing the Aristotelian rules to the letter or, put differently, whether such a work can still convey the same kind of subjective disagreements as in Attic tragedy. The first issue that has to be examined is the formal structure of the play. From there on it should be easier to take a closer look at the intricacies of the plot and its content, that is, the dramatic situation as laid out by the author.

In Sharon Pollock's *Doc* the initial complexity lies in establishing the proper time of action in the play. The play relies on reenactment of past situations, the recurring mnemonic flashes from the past. Even though, like a frame-story, the plot is introduced to the audience through the real-time present action it serves as an opening sequence only to a plunge into the abyss of memory. The events of the past and the present are intricately interrelated. In this way, Pollock weaves a delicate and intricate web of the past and present events while presenting the life-story of a physician's family. Very much against any rules of traditional theatrical dramaturgy, Pollock's stage-present represents in fact the reactualization of what had already taken place, which means that the rule of the triple unity and the absolute stage real-time presence is flagrantly breached. Since the past is, as Aristotle already realized, fundamentally unperformable, traditional tragedy developed ways to circumvent this problem, most frequently by reports, such as the "messenger's report" of the past events, and the "look over the wall" for the simultaneous occurrences. In this vein, by literally bringing the past on stage, Pollock takes advantage of a film-like

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[10] In ancient tragedies this was usually resolved by an insert or an *aparté*.

discourse and presents the past events as present, which simply unfold before the audience's eyes.

Furthermore, because of the form of this revification of the past, action is not represented in one fluid, continuous flow of consciousness or arrangement of events but rather in flashbacks and memories, which are more concerned with the "flavour" of a memory than of the factual event. Thus, Pollock, already on the level of the form, achieves a constant dialogical movement between two represented realities, the present and the past, in which the real-time contemporariness, the one that the audience and the present-day characters share, serves as a point of departure and a connecting link for excursions into the past.

Structurally, contrary to what it may seem, this shifting into the past has been successfully made quite painless. Pollock uses the film effect since film is less bound to represent the real-time presence and the flashbacks into the protagonist's past are understood as realistically as the (fictional) screen presence. Although from a rather different angle, the achieved result is basically the same: while film, always being the matter of the past, pretends to be as contemporary as real life, Pollock's theatre, for which, in general, precisely this reality presents the only medium of existence, pretends to be the matter of the past. Both the film and theatre interventions are created in order to enhance the credibility of the action represented. With the increase of credibility, the reference of the signifier to the signified becomes more compact and the relation of art towards real-life more relevant.

Pollock has enhanced the ease of passing between the periods as well as their mutual flavour by a simultaneous stage-presence of the same dramatic character from different epochs. Since the real-time presence is shared only by two characters on stage, that is Ev and Catherine, only they can participate in this "splitting" of protagonists. Nonetheless, the character of Catherine is here dealt with particularly carefully. Even though she shares the same type of stage presence as Ev, Catherine has been additionally granted an independent actor for the role of Katie, her younger self. Her protagonist is thus simultaneously embodied on stage by two actors playing one Katie and the other Catherine, while Ev remains himself and only is allowed to change costumes and

appearance when necessary. This doubling of the character of Katie/Catherine reaches an interesting hermeneutical dimension when the two actors speak to each other:

Ev: Katie?

Katie: When I was little, Daddy.

Catherine: It's Catherine now, call me Catherine ... (11)[11]

They also interact. Catherine, for example, on more than one occasion tries to comfort Katie:

(Catherine runs to Katie and tries to restrain her)

Catherine: Stop. Stop. Daddy. Daddy!!

(Katie collapses against Catherine)

Help me. (78)

or, again, elsewhere:

Catherine: You can cry, Katie ... it's all right to cry...

Katie: Would you want to have me?

Catherine: Yes, yes I would. (121)

This dramaturgical prestidigitation is charged, in my mind, with a particular task of enhancing the smooth linking of the past to the present on which the entire action of *Doc* depends. Through such a diachronic convergence it becomes evident that the past has actually not yet left the stage, that the two contemporary characters still actually live in it and that, perhaps, the real action is that of the bygone years, not that of the *hic et nunc* so necessary in theatre . The author's purpose is to forcefully dwell on the fact that the past has kept its powerful grip on the two remaining characters who are, whenever they meet, time and again, visited by the spectres of their mutual past life. In this sense, the past is, quite unusually, more relevant for the play than the real-time present. The latter seems to be only a "portal" through which to enter in the murky waters of the bygone years. Clearly, such an attitude toward the past forwards an emotional rather than an intellectual emphasis, which, again, confirms the previous presupposition about the underscoring of the flavour of memory.

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[11] All the quotes from the play are from Sharon Pollock's *Doc*. Playwrights Canada, Toronto 1984.

The memory fulfills here an additionally important function. It lays bare the conflict in which the characters find themselves engaged. Before any threads of the mutually conflictual situation reach to the outside towards an opposing character, each and every of them has to fight and/or deal with his/her own internal woes. Such a positioning of the conflict invokes doubtlessly Hebbel's view on the tragedy, as a necessarily personal matter.[12] So much the more, that the self-realization enabling the tragic does not have to be active (following the ancient paradigms) but, as we have seen, may also be passive, internalized. It is this kind of tragic that we encounter in *Doc*.

The role of the physical gateway to the realm of the past, of the latter's function as a Trojan horse in the present, Pollock has assigned to an object. It is found in a letter left by Gramma, that is Ev's mother, before her alleged suicide or the "accident," as it has been officially identified by the family. It joins those times not even remembered by Katie with the real-time present, functioning as the only factual proof of the past events, which the play is all about. Although unopened, the letter contains the words that confirm what happened. It is the only anchor between the two realms of time. Moreover, were the letter to be opened, it would make the past come true and start existing for real and not only, in the best case, as a figment of imagination. There would be no possibility for an escapist, subjective understanding, a frequent denial of the events despite the fact that everybody claims to know what is written in it – it would most probably mercilessly incriminate all the implicated and smear them with a permanent feeling of guilt. This is why, when the play begins, Ev is found sitting in a chair, holding the unopened envelope in his hand. As if by some magical deception, through this contact with the letter we are transported into the past or, better still, the protagonists' past becomes our present.

The shared actuality introduces Catherine who, for the first time since she had left her parents' home, pays a visit to her father Ev (Everett), a physician, for a twofold reason: the first is an official celebration of the naming of a hospital in Ev's honour, while the second, although acknowledged only silently, is his recent heart attack. Catherine has avoided home since her departure, so instead she kept meeting with Ev at his medical conferences:

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[12] Cf. page 97.

Catherine: Four years, right? Medical convention in where? Vancouver, right?

Ev: That's right. Vancouver.

Catherine: Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, Van, where haven't we met, eh? (11-12)

Her visit to the family home is of particular importance because, although reluctant, she has decided to make this conciliatory gesture. The fact that it was Ev's physical condition that made her overcome her reservations and actually come home, Catherine had to fight her utter unwillingness to be confronted with the place associated apparently with very painful memories. Hence her admission to Ev: "I just came home to see you, I wanted to see you … have you got any idea how hard it was for me to come home, to walk in that door, to, to come home? … Have you? […]" (26). Yet before uncovering the past and despite all the speculations with regard to it, the full contemporary "portrait" of Catherine's, as given by Pollock, should be provided here. Catherine is a single woman in her mid thirties who slips from one affair to the other not willing to commit to anyone: "Actually – I've been thinking … of … of maybe calling it quits with whosits" (27). She lets herself be entirely consumed by her work: "I said it's difficult to keep a relationship goin' when when you're busy, right?" (27). Since she is "always working" (25), and "the work you know. Makes it hard" (28), she does not have, or want to have, the time to establish her own family. In addition to these somewhat external reasons, she could not comply with Ev's wishes for a grandson because "[she]'d only have girls" (27) in addition to being "too old for that" (ibid.). Most obviously, her reasons for staying away from the potential spousal or maternal duties have a deeper and more troubling reason than solely her age or work. Her stance, even with regard to having girls, is quite adamant: "I said I don't know if I want" (ibid.).

Her defensive attitude ought to have something to do with her being a daughter, of being somebody whose experience she would not wish on anyone else. Her work obviously serves as a cover-up for deeper reasons still buried in the past that she has not yet overcome. What appears to be her main concern and what is voiced as her fundamental reproach is the state and condition of her own family. All the excuses she provides inform her attitude towards the idea of family and serve as no less than her

withdrawal from, as Catherine sees it, a vicious circle of familial life. It appears that her anxieties stem from her nuclear family that was not as functional as it should have been. Furthermore, the events that occurred during her youth have marked her for her entire life since she still today cannot rationally and emotionally deal with them. It is here that the introspection into her youth is needed to put together a picture of this troubled woman.

Ev, in turn, is a somewhat self-absorbed elderly man who appears to relate to the external world solely through his own limited perspective. In his real-time stage presence he is seventy six years old, having just had a heart attack and now is slowly recovering. Since he has been living by himself he gives an impression of being a lonely man whom both his children have left for the sake of their own careers. He is abandoned and lonely, thus worthy of our empathy. His emotional admissions are quite fraught with meaning and, at the same time, come across as veiled admonitions of Catherine for not having been around during his ordeal:

Ev:	Don't tell Katie. I musta said that a dozen times. I could hear myself. You're not to tell Katie. You're not to tell Katie.
Catherine:	Why not?
Ev:	Because I didn't want you to know.
Catherine:	Why not?
Ev:	Because I knew, even if you did know, you wouldn't come – and my heart would've burst from that pain. (22-23)

Initially, Ev is portrayed as a caring father who sees himself as having given all he could to his family, but this apparent kindness was paid him back with neglect and abandonment. Realizing that, he pretends not to be needy of any expression of emotions, which is why he forcefully and repeatedly requests for his medical condition to be withheld from Catherine. Yet he is more than satisfied to quickly lay blame for these misgivings solely on Catherine making her look cruel, selfish and utterly egotistic. Such is his heart piercing accusation:

Ev:	[...] If you were livin' in town, I'd have phoned you.
Catherine:	You couldn't if Valma dropped the phone, Daddy.
Ev:	I'd have phoned you first!

Catherine: Would you?

Ev: Well if I'd known she was gonna drop that goddamn phone I would have. (16)

And the last nail in the coffin:

Catherine: You could have died, Daddy.

Ev: If you gave a damn you'd have been here! (23)

Catherine does not, in Ev's opinion, pay proper attention to her father and is too selfish to even superficially show that she cares. In his view, she abandoned him for no particular reason, at least not a good enough reason for him to accept. While laying blame solely on her, he does not see, even as a contingency, the possibility of being at fault himself. He is not interested in envisioning different perspectives of the situation because his firm conviction is based on pure facts. Thus, he blames his daughter, necessarily provoking her spirited response: "What family did you ever raise? You were never home from one day to the next so who are you to talk to me about family?" (25). Yet in the real-time presence and without delving into the past, Catherine's response bears the traits of a personal offense rather than that of a statement based on facts. Ev, not ready to accept even so slight a blame for the failure of the lives of his family, is quick to rebuff her reproaches: "Don't go pointin' your finger at me! Look at yourself! What the hell do you do? Work, work, work – at what, for Christ's sake?" (31), and: "Oh, it's Catherine now, and you write Literature, don't you? And that means you can ignore your brother and your father and dump this Buchanan jerk and forget kids and family [...]" (ibid.). He appears to be troubled, in most cases, by his daughter's adamant rejection of his wishes and in others, at best, reluctant fulfillment of his desires.

Although this may be only a hint that may not necessarily prove fruitful in the bigger picture the above patterns of Ev's behaviour, that is his not being able to hear and listen to the others, seems to be unsettlingly constant. As a consequence, hat should be thoroughly investigated are the protagonists' behaviour in light of their respective characters. For that purpose, the close scrutiny of their past is more than necessary. Not only should this procedure shed light on the protagonists themselves but also on their intricate relationships and reveal the Gordian knot they have tied themselves into.

These glimpses have been only parts of the respective portraits received from the situations in the real-time present. Through them it has become obvious that they are no more than just the tip of the iceberg and that really decisive characteristics have to be looked for in the past. This is the moment in which Pollock brings the past into the present by making it participate in the "reality" on stage. The representation of the former is limited only to the mnemonic flashbacks, which, in this sense, prove a rather immanent, subjective, character-related activity as opposed to the external, objective and stage-based one.

When the past in *Doc* is also taken into consideration what becomes obvious is that it does not have a binary axiological structure, that is one between good and evil, or between two conflicting sides. The essential conflictual scheme of the play is divided into two conflictual axes, which makes it less transparent as well as less likely to be read only in one predominant, necessarily Manichean way. The conflict forms, therefore, a triangle divided between three protagonists. The first antagonistic situation is the one between Ev and his wife Bob, or Eloise Roberts, the second develops between Bob and Katie, while the third axis is the one between Ev and Catherine. This conflictual axis differs from the former two in the fact that it is still evolving. It is the only one that is not the matter of the past but of the stage-present. If the first two have already been concluded, this one is very much alive and, as we have seen, quite dynamic. Interestingly enough, in the center of the triangle is not Ev, the Doc who lent the name to the play but, rather, Bob who is being pushed to the side throughout the play and is brought forward only to illustrate or, better still, place in perspective Ev's actions. This may have come to being by virtue of the traditional patriarchal nuclear family where the wife is supposed to occupy the central position inside the house and be the mediator between the father, necessarily engaging in public matters even so innocuous as work, and their children for whom the father is but a total stranger.

In addition to these three main lines of conflict, some smaller altercations can be traced also between these three main protagonists and the less important characters such as Oscar or even Gramma who appear only in the letter's memories, but they are brought up chiefly in order to underscore and inform the first triangular conflictual disposition of the family.

The first glimpse into Ev's past may be obtained from Oscar, Ev's best friend, his fellow student of medicine. Oscar's father wants his son to be like Ev because even in sports, such as hockey, Oscar, too, has "got to have that killer instinct" (9). Yet Oscar is well aware of the differences between Ev or himself. On the one hand he envies Ev for being so successful yet, on the other, he is utterly uncomfortable and rather unimpressed with Ev's lifestyle: "What's so funny is you're the one so bloody keen on medicine – you'd kill for medicine. (*laughs*) Hey Ev, kill for medicine, eh. (*laughs*)" (10). Although this statement might be perceived as a conclusion of a clandestinely or even subliminally envious friend, the characterization is repeated in their discussion:

Oscar:	You're a lot like my Dad, Ev. The two of you. You're always…
Ev:	What?
Oscar:	Forging ahead.
Ev:	What's wrong with that? (puts on pants)
Oscar:	Nothing. Forging is fine. I admire forging, I do, I admire it. It's just – not for me, do you think that could be my mother in me? (37)

The picture that Oscar and even more remote characters, such as his father, have of Ev is obvious. Ev embodies a healthy drive forward, an ambition not to squander his own life but make the best of it. Although resolute and decisive, he does not appear insensitive or outright mean. He still keeps Oscar as a friend although the latter recognizes his own position, with regard to Ev, as that of a "loser" (38). Even though Ev calls Oscar a "lazy son of a bitch" (ibid.), he still is not above helping him with good advice. Now, the question arises as to the true nature of this benevolence. Oscar might have been treated with more compassion because of their lasting friendship and his constant help, which Ev had benefited from. Therefore, Oscar has not been a real threat to Ev and his career. Should this have been an issue, the relationship would most probably have changed. Ev aptly describes himself in the following words: "Hated, hated losin'! Always. Hockey, politics, surgery, never mattered to me, just *had* to *win*. Could never let go" (24). In addition to this basic trait, Ev points out: "I had to rely on myself cause there

was fuckin' little else to rely on, I made decisions when decisions had to be made, I chose a road, and I took it, and I never looked back" (81).

In addition to being a bit senile but still caring and loving grandfather, Ev appears less benevolent. His drive for success consists of two elements: the need to win and to be ahead of others. These needs point at a focus on himself. Thus his quest seems to be a self-fulfilling and self-glorifying one. When trying to explain this side of his personality to Catherine, Ev first lashes out at her at the end of the already cited dialogue: "oh, it's Catherine now, and you write Literature, don't you? And that means you can ignore your brother [...], but your father who gave his life to medicine because he believed in what he was doin' is an asshole!" and he continues "my whole family never had a pot to piss in, lived on porridge and molasses when I was a kid" (31), "and fought for every goddamn thing I got!" (32).

This statement reveals a man who is determined to succeed and to never be subjected to poverty again. He is also seen as having been subjected to others' expectations. These are his mother's, that is Gramma's, expectations. Gramma, as we learn from a dialogue between Ev and Oscar, has laid all her hopes in her oldest son. Even though her husband has lost his job, she was still prepared to send him to medical school, "the best in the country" (46). Ev was aware of her desires because he admits to Oscar that "mum would probably kill me if I gave up the Royal Vic" (ibid.). In her opinion, at least one of her children should be provided with the best education and made, according to the societal standards, successful. With regard to Ev's drive to achieve this goal it is not very clear whether it was his own or, perhaps, "implanted" into him by Gramma so that her plans, in fact, became his. This relation between the desires of one and the drive of the other remains quite obscure.

Regardless, fear of poverty and his desire for success overwhelm Ev completely and become an inevitable real-life experience that weighs heavily on his character. This idiosyncrasy of his guarantees and underscores his devotion to his occupation: "I'm doin' rounds at night and squeezin' in house calls after that" (68). By being so committed to his work, he is "there" not only for his regular patients but also for their families: "Frank's been a patient of mine since I started practice. Who the hell else could I send?" (65). He regularly drives around the countryside, once he even falls asleep behind the steering

wheel. It is obvious that Ev thinks about himself only through his occupation. His professional decisiveness to ford all the adversary streams emphasizes his complete dedication to vocation as a physician. On the one hand, the picture of Ev as a true philanthropist is thus confirmed, yet on the other, it is clear that this philanthropy does not come from an idealist conviction but, rather, from his own poor and perturbed past. Furthermore, the price that this unconditional philanthropy demands has to be also taken into account.

Even if this is so, then his position is worthy of praise and there is little to blame in him. Even after closer scrutiny it is not self-evident where there may be conditions ripe for a conflict. In order to clarify this, we should have a look at his counterpart, his wife Bob. Ev disregarded the "best training in the country" for a specialist "just" to marry Bob who was, to aggravate things even more, "only" a nurse. He trampled on his mother's dreams, which he recollects in the dialogue with Catherine:

Ev: You can't be serious. The Vic's the best post-graduate training in the country. I've worked goddamn hard for it and I won't give it up – not for Mum if she asked me! Not for Millie! Not for anyone!

Catherine: But you did, Daddy. (Ev looks at Catherine) You gave it up for her.

Ev: If… if you could have seen her.

For this reason Bob was forever excluded from his family. Gramma hated Bob for a reason:

Bob: You were there. You heard her. "Poor Ev. Giving up the Vic." You'd think a general practice was the end of the earth – And why've you fallen so far?

Ev: She never said any of those things.

Bob: She implied I'd caught you by the oldest trick in the book.

Such an implication left Bob with a heavy burden that she never was able to lay aside. Moreover, it was Bob's belief that Gramma committed suicide because of her failed dream with regard to Ev, which she keeps bringing up as ammunition against Ev and repeats with increasing bitterness to Katie that "your Gramma, Katie, his mother.

She'd set her clock by that train [...] and that night do you know what she did?" Disregarding Katie's consternation, she continues "your father's mother, your grandmother, killed herself ... Katie!" (4). Before she did so, she had left a letter, the letter Ev keeps turning in his fingers, reluctant to open and read because he might learn the truth. Gramma's death has remained a fateful sign to Eloise Roberts that she never will be pardoned for "ruining" Ev's life.

Bob's apparent egotism and phenomenal insensitivity are thus revealed to have a different meaning. Bob too had great aspirations for herself. She quotes her mother as saying, "we have been here since the Seventeen hundreds, Eloise, and in your blood runs the blood of Red Roberts! Do you know who he is? A pirate, with flamin' red hair and a flamin' red beard who harboured off a cove in P. E. I.! A pirate! And inside of me – just bustin' to get out! To reach out! To grow!" (62, 63). To make Bob's position even harder, her mother had to clean houses in order to make Eloise go through school: "anyway, so all these people, mother, sisters, Bill, they all worked to put me through nursing, wasn't that wonderful of them?" (70). She, too, has desires, wishes and aspirations to become a good and reliable nurse, to do something in life and to help others. In this sense, she is almost Ev's *alter ego*, his mirror image. Yet Bob was made to feel as if she had to atone for "dragging down" Ev, which she, at some point, realizes in a very cruel way.

This is where her troubles begin. When Bob wants to return to her work as an R. N. at the hospital, Ev flatly refuses. As "Ev from the past" explains to "Catherine in the present" in an intricate trans-temporal dialogue, "I don't want her there," because it is "a matter of policy" (54). Work cannot be mixed with private relations "because as a surgeon operating out of that hospital, I don't want my wife on staff. I don't want any surgeon's wife on staff. And I don't know any surgeon who wants his wife on staff" (55). Thus, societal rules as well as Ev's own strict convictions barred Bob from reentering an active life of personal fulfilment. From that point on, she has to remain at home, where she can only "rattle around with a four month-old baby to talk to" (55) and do nothing else but play the role of the Housewife. With Ev's adamant refusal to allow her back to work, Bob's life suddenly takes a different turn. A previously active, successful and attractive woman unexpectedly finds herself trapped. Even the prospect of the "trap" being a golden cage does not help much, perhaps it makes things even worse. Thus she

complains, "I don't like the cleanin' lady. Because every time … the cleanin' lady comes in, I think of my Mama who cleaned all around so I could go into nursing [...] and you want to know what's worse? My Mama's so happy I married a doctor. I'm successful you see. I made something of myself. (*moves away smiling; lifting her glass in a toast*) I married a doctor" (71).

Ev, in accordance with his professional devotion, decided not only to take care of, and provide for, his family but rather to make an impact on society and take as good a care of the populace as possible. Yet this could not be realized without one side paying a terrible price. That side was primarily Bob and, consequently, his entire family. Bob, feeling increasingly abandoned, once states that Ev "doesn't care. He does not care about anything except his "prac-tice" and his "off-fice" and his "off-fice nurse" and all those stupid, stupid people who think he's God" (6). Yet Ev does not seem to be able to understand her. Furthermore, he doesn't seem even to care. The only important family obligation he sees is providing enough for living. He bitterly complains, "I work my ass off. Why do I do it if it's not for her?" (67). Obviously, not only does Bob feel betrayed in her own plans for her life, but Ev keeps completely disregarding her also as his partner. Worse even, he appears to be totally deaf to her needs as a woman. Oscar, when once enquiring about Ev's busy evening schedule, learns about the grim truth of the couple's cohabitation:

Oscar:	When do you sleep?
Ev:	I don't.
Oscar:	How the hell did she ever get pregnant?
Ev:	I didn't say I never laid down. (68-9)

Another such example of neglect occurred at the birth of Bob's and Ev's second child, son Robbie. Even then Ev cannot stay with his wife. He is too busy and in a *post festum* discussion with Oscar who reproachfully claims that "it was important to Bob you be here, she needed you," coldly replies "well, Frank Johnston needed me more!" (65). Sadly, as if personal neglect was not enough, Ev offended Bob even more profoundly by pushing her away, indeed, into Oscar's arms. Oscar, having remained a good family friend was, in Ev's eyes, the best possible company for Bob. He was much less busy than Ev (for him that was a sign of complete indolence), he was interested in everything else

but medicine, which was his least favourite and, most importantly, when Oscar openly admits his feeling attracted to Bob, Ev calmly rejects his statement saying that "I just don't believe you'd do that to me" (90).

The conditions of the first conflictual axis have become quite palpable. The relationship between Ev and Bob reveals the problem, although there is no particular conflict with regard to its ancient Aristotelian qualities. It is true that Ev never used physical force against Bob, he never raised voice against her or even reproached her for the decision he had made. For this reason their relationship might have appeared as good as any other and Ev as devout and caring a husband as possible. Yet his violence is of a different nature. It is the violence of self-sufficiency, of disinterest and of exclusion of everybody who appears useless. In comparison with ancient tragedy, Pollock's characters do not do this in a Medean way, that is particularly concentrated on doing, or paying back, evil. On the contrary, Ev is convinced that he is doing the "right thing." And the paradox of his situation is that the more he is convinced and the more "good" he does to people, the more insupportable it is for Bob and the entire family. From Bob's perspective, Ev's tragic fallacy is in an inverse setting of values. Moreover, he has set them at the exclusion of Bob, which may point to his double standards. Thus, the essential "quality" of the conflict is passive, yet based on convictions as the ancient ones. His incapability to understand the plight of his wife causes a similar effect to that of the ancient idea of hubris. Although characters caught in its fatal loop all struggle to make things work out better, they follow into their own ethical fallacies and whatever they do, it only leads to the aggravation of the overall situation.

The issue of hubris is also applicable to the heroes of *Doc* and this means that the issue of unavoidability of the conflict can be raised. Strictly speaking, these events have all already happened. They are not "original," just occurring in front of our eyes as forcefully required by Aristotle, but only a memory, a figment of imagination. In this vein, the present situation of Ev and Catherine is utterly unavoidable because of the simple and necessary passage of time and its immanent logic of impact. This in itself would, of course, not suffice for the tragic unavoidability I have in mind. Yet, let me reiterate, this past, which is reenacted for the spectators' sake, bears the weight of the real-time stage present. Thus, one should concentrate not on the diachronic but on a

synchronic unavoidability of facts and actions because the true unavoidability, in the Aristotelian sense, is one embodied by the present events. It directs the action only one way despite the characters' efforts to lead it across a different path. In antiquity this characteristic depended on the presence of hubris whereas in contemporary tragic works it may as well be a consequence of only a character-trait. But in Ev's case, as it seems, we have both elements, namely, his position may correspond to ancient hubris without laying blame on ancient divinities or destiny. What informed Ev's worldview might have been his mother, his personal experience of poverty, as well as his bold and aggressive character. Still, what appears as a significant factor in the tragedy of this couple is the societal axiological system that dictates to individuals the rules of their existence and forms their personal values. If in antiquity Antigone, for example, would have become a heroine precisely because of her stance against the socially accepted values, today's protagonists are defined by their inability to break out. Their situation is truly unavoidable since regardless of their decision to stay within the system or to leave and rebel, they remain tragic heroes. If Zucco's case was tragic in a more theatrical, Hegelian way, which means that he got punished because he wanted to break away, *Doc's* characters' tragic is already different, a more Hebbelian, more interiorized one. Theirs is not the tragic of action but, rather, that of passivity.

Under such circumstances it is no wonder, then, that Bob was not able to live in such a distressful situation. Thus began her true tragedy, her inadvertent descent into alcoholism. A complete neglect on the part of the husband made her focus solely on her own plight, on drowning her sorrows in alcohol, which, in turn, made her less attentive to the needs of her two children whom she increasingly abused in her efforts to make a point against her husband. Although she has been sliding down on the slippery slope of self-abandonment, one of the final blows to her femininity comes when she was diagnosed with cancer of the womb. In one of the last attempts to rationally understand and, consequently, put under control her suppressed emotions and wounded womanhood, she explains to Oscar: "Me! Me! I'm talkin' about me! Why do I feel like, why do I feel – we didn't want any more children! I can't have any more children! Me, that part of me that's important, here, inside here – Me! That's the same. I'm the same. So … why do I feel that it matters?" (92). And since she is not able to come up with a solution, she collapses.

With a deep sorrow and full of bitter resentment to life for having treated her this way she discloses: "Sometimes I want to scream. I just want to stand there and scream, to hit something, to reach out and smash things – and hit and smash and hit and smash and … and then … I would feel very tired and I could lie down and sleep" (93). With time, even this became too much for her to bear. She finally had enough. The sleep she has been talking about began to take on more and more importance, especially in light of her realization that there was nothing left for her in life. Although she tried to join the doctors' spouses club and play bridge with them, this failed to give her enough satisfaction to find a reason to continue. In fact, it incessantly reminded her of her vegetative existence. Ev stopped even noticing her, which she could not help but read as his complete rejection of her as a barren woman. Quite characteristic of this level of their relationship is the following exchange, where she claims: "You don't love me, you never loved me! You never loved me," to which Ev can only respond with his standard "Go to bed" (103).

This blunt realization, of course, does not help her frustration. Three times they were able to save her and the fourth time she was finally successful in her bid to end her life. To Ev, who separated himself emotionally as well as rationally long ago from his estranged wife her death did not represent anything but an unpleasant necessity and a proof of his correct reasoning. He has namely kept his only ideal to which he has clung with all of his irrational powers that surfaced in a charged dialogue with Oscar who finally has managed to find the courage and straightforwardly accuse Ev of her death. Yet Ev remains untouched: "Supposin' it were, her death my fault, put a figure on it, eh? Her death my fault on one side – and the other any old figure, thousand lives the figure – was that worth it? (*Oscar exits*) Was it? I'm askin' you a question! Was that worth it!" (123).

According to my previous discussion of the irresolvability of conflicts, the death of protagonist does not necessarily mean an automatic resolution of the quarrel. Thus, it is my belief, that Bob's voluntary death not only brings no resolution to the situation but it actually complicates it even further. Ev is left with two deaths to come to terms with, first his mother's and then his wife's. Although he might be in possession of a key to the first one, that is the letter he is left with, virtually nothing is left for him in the second case. To underscore her conscious decision, Pollock makes Bob destroy all her pictures

so that, once she has departed, not a trace of her would remain. By obliterating herself from the memories of her family and by making this gesture so evident, Bob achieves a contrary effect, which, to also include this possibility, might have been her plan. If, in Gramma's case, Ev absolutely lacks the courage to open the letter and, presumably, learn the truth, that is put in danger the purpose of his entire life as he sees it, then, in Bob's instance, he cannot do it. He is hindered in rationalizing and finding excuses for himself and in coming to terms with her death because of the way in which she has obliterated all traces of herself. Bob's extremely radical "departure" bars Ev from ever being able to reconcile himself with her death.

The third participant in the conflict is Ev's and Bob's daughter Katie. Her position is radically different from her parents' since their clashes emerge from their conscious actions whereas Katie's, as all children, was relegated to passivity. The passivity of characters involved in a conflict should not automatically mean lesser suffering. Katie is a perfect example. Her problem is a classical one of a neglected, misunderstood, mistreated and, in fact, abandoned child. She grows up in a dysfunctional family where the façade is one of extreme importance and where parents' individualism as well as their lack of understanding, especially in Ev's case, did nothing but harm to the family.

At first, it is clear that Katie does not understand the power dynamics and consequent struggle between her parents. She has complete confidence in their being able to protect her and provide her with a caring, safe and loving family. Yet the reality slowly starts to show a very different and much more crude face. Initially Katie is capable of grasping this reality only in an innocent, child-like way, as she admits to Oscar: "You don't work as hard as my father. My father is never home. He goes to the hospital before we're up, and when he comes home we're asleep," and adds, "I'm surprised Daddy knows who Robbie is. I'm surprised Robbie knows who Daddy is…" (58). However, she soon becomes afraid and disillusioned. Katie, too, passes through the process of realization and maturing through suffering. At the beginning of this conflict she believes her father's claim that Bob is sick, yet soon thereafter she discovers her mother's real problem to be alcoholism that she tries to remedy by pouring the alcohol down the drain. As we discover through flashbacks, the two instances in which Katie takes alcohol away from her mother and in altercation between mother and daughter. Katie hits Bob twice so

hard that she falls. From Katie's childish perspective, she reveals her recollections in a dialogue with Catherine, that is her mature self: "I was a bit happy not to go because I don't like to go anywhere with Mummy when she's like that. She said Gramma was a bitch who went around saying bad things about her and Mummy was glad she was dead – and Daddy just kept getting dressed and pretended Mummy wasn't talking" (99).

Katie eventually realizes her parents stayed together only because of her, causing her to blame herself. Thus, in addition to her feeling of abandonment she acquires through her own reflections a sense of guilt: "Inside I do know. Because of me – and that's what went wrong" (101). Consequently, Katie begins to withdraw form her mother and she stops loving and caring for her:

Ev:	Your mother sometimes says things that she doesn't mean. She's sick and she –
Katie:	She isn't sick!
Ev:	She loves you.
Katie:	I don't love her. (102)

At this stage, Katie has reached the pinnacle of her plight. Overwhelmed by fear, she begins to hate her mother and she distances herself from her too by referring to her not as her mother but rather a drunk: "She's a drunk and that's what we should say!" (119). She stops listening to Bob and hearing her. After having lost any emotional tie to her, she looks at Bob only in order to remember her for later. Katie reveals to Bob that "someday you will be dead and I'll be happy!" (ibid.). In her unbearable pain she has already devised a plan for after her mother's death: "I'll go back downstairs and I'll sit in the kitchen and I'll pretend that I don't know, I'll pretend that everything's all right, I'll shut my eyes, and I'll pretend" (ibid.).

Regardless of these attempts at distancing herself from her mother, Katie/Catherine fails to disengage herself form her pain. Quite clearly Catherine is suffering from an internal, passive tragic. The conflict in her case is unavoidable, for as a child, like all children, she depends on her parents emotionally as well as intellectually. The conflict to which Katie is being exposed is absolutely unavoidable. Nonetheless, a much more important element seems to be the irresolvability of the situation. It is the

irresolvability of the problem that links Katie with Catherine, past with present and makes the play possible at all.

As we have already seen, Catherine has been extremely reluctant to return home even for a short visit. She has consciously tried to break away from the paradigm of her Gramma and her mother. Her departure and utter reluctance to return may be thus seen as her desperate grasping for a different kind of life and breaking the vicious circle. On more than one occasion she asserts adamantly that she is different from Gramma. When, for example, Oscar hints at Katie's drive that she got from Ev and Ev from Gramma, she is terrified: "I would never walk across a train bridge at midnight," and "I'm not like her! I would never do that!" (42). And, later, to Oscar: "I'm named after Gramma, but I'm not like my Gramma. … I know when trains are coming … and then they're coming I don't go that way then…" (72). She is equally reluctant to identify with her mother, as is revealed in one of her dialogues with her younger self: "I don't want to be like her, and I don't want to be like Mummy…" (83).

In her zeal to avoid becoming her mother and grandmother, she has completely abandoned a female role model. As Catherine, she arrives at a painful revelation: "For a long time I prayed to God. I asked him to make her stop. I prayed and prayed. I thought, I'm just a little girl. Why would God want to do this to a little girl? I thought it was a mistake. I thought maybe he didn't know. I don't know what I thought. I prayed and prayed… Now, I don't believe in God" (7). She has therefore become like her father. As a grown up, she has remained convinced that to be a small girl is some kind of mistake. She has busied herself professionally like her father and has denied herself the possibility of motherhood. She found her only solace in writing because "I used to pray to God, but I don't anymore. I write it all down in here. I was just little then and now –" (83). Later she decided to pursue writing as her career. Yet her efforts have been in vain. Her father believes her drive is similar to his mother's instinct and determination undermining Catherine's efforts to deny any such connection. She reacts to his observation by asking a rhetorical question: "And you say I'm like his side of the family, you say I'm like her?" (98).

Catherine returns home after many years only to meet Ev but also the "spirits" of both women. This becomes obvious in a stunning disclosure about her nature: "I'm

accident prone. Some people are you know. Accident-prone. I do dangerous things. I like doing dangerous things" (58). This parallel brings her in vicinity of Gramma who had an "accident." The same could be maintained for Bob, too, who had been sick and therefore, made a suicide by "accident." Katie finally realizes she is like Gramma. She therefore negates all allegations with regard to the said similarity. The more there is actual basis for the validity of this hypothesis, the more vigorously she fends it off.

Ironically, the harder Katie/Catherine attempts to escape the patterns of the past the more she was drawn into it. The more she worked to discover her own self, the closer she came to opening her Pandora's box. The unhappy pattern uncannily reminds again of the working principle of ancient hubris. It is not before the end of the play, however, that the two paths finally merge. Nonetheless, during her real-time presence on stage with Ev she has kept urging her father to finally open the letter so that the truth might be revealed and the unbearable weight of supposition lifted. At one point, she herself seized the letter and came awfully close to opening it. This urge to take action is intended to lay to rest her internal troubles, her feeling of being split. Yet the question is what this epiphany would end up provoking. It would substantiate all her fears and thus provide a reason for her suffering. Afraid of reliving the past, Catherine makes a conscious decision to get rid of these perturbing memories and consequently sets the letter on fire. In a unifying moment Catherine bonds with Ev on this point of character Burning the letter destroys the sole material proof of the past, severing the links between past and present. As in ancient tragedy, which does not resolve the issue only destroys the protagonist, here, too, the smoldering letter takes away the material proof but the suffering endures. Ev and Catherine become even more like each other in their shared desire to run away from the truth. Her act undermines all her resistance to becoming like her family, perpetuating the cycle of neglect and cruelty. Catherine decides to support Ev's view that the two women are to blame for the past. Catherine has been literally created out of the putrid atmosphere of her parents' home. In order to survive, she would have to either obviously struggle beyond her capabilities or go with the flow, as she did. It is precisely because of the fact that she fought so courageously up to the point when she returned home that her unquestioned support for Ev is so significant. The circle cannot be broken, the victims cannot make the tormenters accountable for their deeds, therefore the pictures of personal

as well as communal worlds remain the same. With the letter, the symbolic carrier of the truth, also the truth itself is made inaccessible and along with that the possibility of any resolution. The (hi)story is bound to repeat itself.

5.3 David Greig, *Europe*

Greig's *Europe* is the most recent of all the plays discussed so far. Yet, as far as the form of subjectivity championed in it is concerned, I shall place it before Kushner's play *Angels in America* that I shall discuss later. Written in 1994, in the midst of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, the play undoubtedly reveals the concern of the western European states for the war-torn region as well as for themselves. Regardless of David Greig's distance from the regions in question, he is from Scotland, he intuits and describes the tragic situation of the protagonists with extreme sensitivity. Yet, Greig reaches beyond his geographical limitation and makes obvious his interest in the mechanisms of violence particularly those that develop along the binary oposition of "us" and "them." This may explain his apt portraiture since it stems from his own experience. As Greig himself maintains, "Ironically, the play could have been called *Scotland* because a lot of small town industry shut down about that time resulting in racism and sectarian violence. I wanted to explore how that could happen."[13]

In the developmental trajectory of the subject that I have sketched, *Europe* seems to best answer the poststructuralist theoretical perspective. Most of all, it entertains the questions of the fluidity of the subject and its dichotomy between the movement and permanence. Its characters are caught in a reality that forces them to make decisions and choose between two equally unsatisfactory alternatives. The play can be also seen as a fascinating development of the key issues raised in the two previously discussed dramas, namely the problem of "visibility" and its condition for existence as laid out in *Roberto Zucco* and the "hegemony of the past" that keeps exerting an uncanny control over the protagonists in *Doc*. Both motives are essential to Greig's *Europe*, even though on the

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[13] Interview with David Greig, Edinburgh, 25 March 2001. Quoted in Reinelt, 380.

surface the play tackles more mundane issues such as chauvinism, racism, and tension provoked by an economic downturn.

The main questions pertaining to the characters in *Europe* seems to me to be rootedness, belonging, and the formation of subjectivities. The play offers two positions with regard to this riddle. On the one hand, a group of people experiencing social problems that, by stirring and changing the comfortably familiar world of the protagonists, open up an immense field for self-questioning, doubt, reassessment of the known values and, in many a case, also dissatisfaction and fear. On the other hand, there is a group of people who already had lived through an apocalypse and try to reconstitute themselves anew. From this such questions arise as to whether only "belonging to one place" provides sufficient ground for one's own essential self-realization? Or can subjectivity be positively affirmed through, and in, a movement, that is in a detached, indeterminate, even contingent mode of existence?

Greig's play is, as I shall demonstrate, informed by Poststructuralism, yet not slavishly dependent on its conjectures of devolution. On the contrary, the movement in its most rudimentary form of physical displacement does not appear as the only way out of the situation because of the necessity of change. Rather, it happens because of the inappropriateness, an outright danger that stability brings to the protagonists. And so traveling is viewed as a very positive, constructive, self-affirming and subjectivity-building practice. Nonetheless, Greig uses it with a particular twist, rendering this positive and affirmative experience tragic. The basic structure of tragedy is thus reconfirmed: a subjectivity established with certainty finds itself in an unavoidable and irresolvable situation. *Europe* can thus be read as a contemporary tragedy.

History over time adds its flavour to the mix as both a protection from change and a burden. Especially if, as in most cases, it is mythologized and interpreted one-sidedly, serving as a psychological safe haven for those who cannot find their own existence in the present and instead are entrenched in history. Faithfully observing the past, these people believe they have a sense of direction for the future. This view is based on a presumption that the repetition of the deeds of the past should provide the best possible guarantee for a safe future.

Such a perspective does not allow for change. On this basis one can start differentiating between the natives (us) and the newcomers (them), spawning all manner of animosities. As for the secure feeling of belonging, this view provides reasons for one's own private identity as long as this person identifies with a larger group such as a people or a nation, in which these tendencies are latently present. However, their radical forms of rejection of the Other are in a normal and moderately successful society usually kept "under control" yet typically flare up when the society's basic requirements of peaceful and wealthy existence are jeopardized. Idealism is perceived as a wasteful and unnecessary daydreaming. The "dreamers" are rarely understood. Sometimes they are even viewed as outrightly dangerous. It is into this kind of pressured environment that Greig introduces his audience.

In order to emphasize the pan-European character of the action, Greig introduces a typical setting, so frequently encountered in Europe, namely "a small town on the border, at various times on this side, / and, / at various times, / on the other, / but always / on the border" (1). The town that has been until recently divided by state lines, as so many across the continent are, is precisely "famous [...] for being on the border" (ibid.). In Europe, so recently divided by many a border, there have been innumerable smaller or larger towns that have shared this characteristic. They were literally divided by the border or, at least, so very close to the state line that it appeared as if they belonged to both sides. They were enlivened by the presence of the border, their lives were guaranteed by the complexity to pass state frontiers. What for the majority of population, especially in the politically eastern block, represented a brutal restriction and curbing on their rights as citizens, provided the inhabitants of such towns with a basic lifeline and reason to exist. Interestingly enough, although the topic of the border would enable Greig to intensify his discussion of identity and self-awareness in both the local inhabitants as well as the newcomers, he chooses to link the action of his play to the economic conditions.

Thus, the fundamental point of reference in Greig's *Europe* becomes "a small decaying provincial town in Europe" (xi) that has always been but a dot on the map, a place with no sights whatsoever worthy of making a stop let alone a detour. Since it has been a transit town through which "you pass, / on your way to an older, / more beautiful / or more important place" (2), it has been condemned to its own small solipsist and self-

contained life. By virtue of the town's geographically provincial character "*the predominant mood is of a forgotten place*" (3). In addition to that it has been hit hard economically and is in decline. The character of the people living in such a town usually reflects the nature of the place. We would expect the residents to be self-absorbed and not concerned with the outside world. These inhabitants' *raison d'être* is the town's particularly vulnerable inner balance. The inhabitants' identities, therefore, are inseparable with the "identity" of the town. They *are* what the town *is*. The town's character informs the *condition humaine* of its residents. Moreover, this link is permanent, therefore it constructs a vicious circle. The inhabitants rely on each other's sameness and changelessness, which, in turn, provides the basic components for the character of the town itself.

Berlin, a factory worker, together with his friends, Billy and Horse, is a paramount example of the prevailing sense of dissatisfaction and fear of change. Being stuck in the same place gives these men the feeling of entrapment, yet also a rather clear awareness of their incapability to break out of the circle. This realization is aggravated after they lose their jobs in the only factory in town robbing them of their only means of self-construction as integral to the town and its functioning. Berlin, for instance, declares: "Machines can run a furnace apparently. Apparently they don't need furnacemen," or elsewhere "Apparently, I've been unnecessary for some time, " and "… not just unnecessary, Adele, but harmful as well" (all quotes 6).

Lacking any internal resources to come to terms with this loss of identity, inextricably bound to what they have known to be the only way to live, the inhabitants despair. If they cannot work, that is identify with the only thing they know, who, then, are they? How can they relate to the world around them? Berlin makes his despair known to his wife Adele in the subsequent soliloquy, "You've no idea. I'm fucked. You're fucked. We're fucked. Fucking out of it. Out of the fucking running. Fucked utterly" (7). Although put in an incomparably more crude way, his realization reminds us of the Old Gentleman in *Roberto Zucco*. Even though some have to learn to live with this experience, such is the case of the Old Gentleman who blames nobody but himself for it, others find it unbearably difficult to do so and lay blame on others. This is indeed Berlin's reaction.

Opposing the new and unknown is also the local stationmaster, Fret. In opposition to the workers, his identification with the work is based on a rational premeditation that relies on the orderly character of his professional duties. Therefore, he thinks, the railwayman's job is essential by virtue of its structured nature, since even a well-oiled machine cannot run without the smallest cog: "When you're in the railways [...] you're connected to the heart of things ... so you have to keep a constant watch on every little situation because there's always the possibility of repercussions along the line ..." (10). This responsibility, even if overblown in his mind, enables him to look at the world as an orderly laid-out place. Everything and everybody has its proper place. Any injustice is only a deviance in the system, a mistake that draws the attention to the essentially well thought-out configuration of life. This same logic informs Fret's life. As he argues, "If you want to run a station like this you have to learn you can't just let things ride. Not in this job. You have to take control, get a hold of the reins early on ... see what's happening and respond effectively with action ... " (9). His sense of life thus concentrates on the order, stability and permanence of things whose main characteristic is precisely its supposed eternity. Fret goes even so far as to swear that behind this beautifully arranged system there has to be some other unearthly force. Therefore, in a discussion with a "foreigner" at his station, a man who is also a railwayman, about the manual railway points, they come to the conclusion:

Sava:	There's something spiritual about it.
Fret:	Spiritual. Exactly.
Sava:	Almost religious...
Fret:	When it comes to manual points I'm orthodox. I'm a fundamentalist. (47-8)

Although reflected and founded on eschatological premises, this desire to preserve the existing order seems strikingly similar to that of the physical labourers. All the while the railwayman perceives himself as a guardian of this transcendental principle and believes himself to be the system's essential component.

Identifying with his job in a different, more sophisticated way than the workers, Fret nonetheless feels happy to accept changes in the community. Yet these

transformations, as they hit the factory, influence his station too. First he feels utterly lost since he is not able to follow the timetable any more:

Sava: Here, you see. In small writing. This station's marked with an x.

Fret (reading): "Station no longer in operation.'

Sava: I think you are, Mr. Fret.

Fret: … what …

Sava: No Longer Operative as of … next month.

Fret: No. No. (40)

The border crossing no longer exists, therefore the trains do not stop in town any more. Now, "they do all that in between stops" (41). The smallest of cogs in the machine has become useless and unnecessary. The "believer" has lost the fundament of his "faith." The closure of the railway station is a blow to his world. Nonetheless, Fret is, unlike the laborers, able to rationalize the happening and to make logical conclusions. He understands he became a victim of the same process of progress he supported initially: "I said to them. Don't expect me to stand in the way of change. I'm all for it. I'm a railwayman. I'm all for progress" (41). Progress, he thought, can evolve only in the positive direction, that is make things better, thus "I'm all for going forward. Things have to get better. Machines get bigger, smoother … the engineering safer. I'm all for efficiency" (ibid.). Yet he failed to make the connection between the development and the impact it would have on his own condition. He and his own job became part of the increased efficiency introduced through progress. Unlike the workers who react with fear transformed into anger and hatred, he becomes bitter. Progress not only makes things better, it changes them to the extent of non-recognition. The two railwaymen elevate this realization to the authority of God:

Sava: I'm a railwayman, you're a railwayman.

Fret: Steel and tracks and trains like blood muscle and arteries holding the continent together. Connecting this place with a hundred thousand other places like it from Rotterdam to Athens.

Sava: For all I know God's a railwayman.

Fret: If God was a railwayman then things would stay on track. Things would run smoothly. I'd say God works in head office. I'd say God wears a suit. (48-9)

Yet at the end of their careers they have no energy left to rebel. Although they do protest and deny the turn of events, there is really nothing they can do. As a result, their lives become filled with deep and irresolvable despondency. In Fret's words, "So now they tell me this. Thirty years of progress, thirty years of laying down tracks and making trains and they send me this…" (41). Fret has become utterly redundant overnight. His own ideal that has backstabbed him and now, because of his age, he has no hope left.

The more ubiquitous and overwhelming this perception of betrayal, loss and disappointment is, the more surprising is another attitude, such as that of Adele, Berlin's wife and Fret's daughter. She is living in a world of her own, yet not without touch with the crude reality. Her days appear to be quite simple: in addition to helping her father at the station, she passes long hours in trainspotting and daydreaming. Like everybody else in the small town, she has never been anywhere else, as she admits on more than one occasion, "But … you've seen things, you've travelled, … I've only imagined …" (49), or "I've unloaded parcels from Warsaw. I've sold tickets to Warsaw. I've seen Warsaw in pictures, but I've never been" (5). Not only does she live off this dream of hers, she is devoured by it. She admits in another discussion, this time about Budapest, that "I've read about it, imagined it, I've been there so often in my head. I think I'd recognize it. I think I'd remember it" (32). She fully identifies with her desires. It can be said about her that she *is all* what she *is dreaming* about. There are no boundaries, of course, to imagination. By being geographically defined, Adele's imagination travels to the places that are, if the Chorus may be repeated once again, "older, / more beautiful / or more important" (2).

Trying to fill her hunger for an eventful life she always finds her small and "decrepit" town lacking. The only resolution for her remains the train station. She does not miss one train's passing through the station; it provokes a highly romanticized experience such as the following example of an Amsterdam train, "Look. Follow my hand. A chain of lights, look for a chain of lights … a chain of Amsterdam diamonds …" (35). Because Adele embodies her desire, the intensity of this wanting has been decidedly

augmented since the trains stopped arriving at the station. This is why she cannot make herself see things in a same light as both her husband and father. If for both men the town's economic slump spells their personal catastrophe. she perceives it as a long awaited chance for liberation. She makes her opinion obviously known to Berlin at the beginning of the play when he announces that he has lost his job:

Adele: Maybe it's fate … maybe it's God.

Berlin: It would be just like him.

Adele: It could be a sign…

Berlin: A sort of "Piss off, Berlin, you're out" sign?

Adele: A green light.

A chance.

Do you remember we said before … when the border opened … we said, "What's to stop us?'

Do you remember? What's to stop us?

A factory, a job, a station.

That's all … a pissy job … nothing … worthless.

Maybe it's a chance, Berlin. A new start. (6-7)

She is not capable of feeling empathy for Berlin because of her concentration on her yearning. What comes across is her insensitivity toward others. It is no wonder then that for Berlin the new turn of events means a double betrayal: by his home town and his wife.

Billy is the only other character who, like Adele, sees the changes in a different light. He sees this town as a place that provided him with a job. Without the job, he does not have to be held back. His identity relies neither on the place nor on the work. This is the message that he tries to convey to his buddies just before leaving:

Billy: Look around you, Berlin.

The place is fucked.

We live in a dirty, nothing place … it's fucked, mate.

On its way down. Sinking. Anyone can see that. You just need to look around you …

[…]

Berlin: But this is … where you live, Billy.

Billy: I don't live here, it's a weight, a stone in the stomach, it's not a place to live it's a place to die. (21)

Similarly, even when Adele reminds Berlin of their mutual dreams, he cannot relate. In a conversation with his friends, he declares that "I'm staying here. Staying put. Do what I can to keep sane. It's home, isn't it? Roots. I've got a wife" (22). He might have toyed with the idea of leaving but not seriously. He had his job, the only one he could do, and that was all he could have possibly wanted. Yet the idea has always been there:

Billy: Get out while you can, if you can.

Berlin: I can leave any time if I want to…

Billy: Bullshit, you're trapped.

Berlin: I just don't want to leave at this moment in time.

Billy: You're trapped.

Berlin: Fuck you.

Billy: You're stuck, under the bedclothes, can't get up and face the day in case the world's moved on in the night. Keep the curtains closed and lie still … stuck. That's you.

Berlin: Fuck you, Billy … I just want … (22)

This is the reason why, when Adele reminds him of their fantasies, the only reply he can provide is the following. His world crumbles and with it, so does he:

Berlin: You're not helping, Adele.

Adele: But you're free. Don't you see? You've been released.

Berlin: I didn't want to be released, Adele. I can't do anything else. Working the furnace is my job. It's all I know. There's nothing else. Nowhere else for me to go. (7)

Despite these pretenses, Berlin is incapable of separating his identity and his notion of self from the town. Since one of the fundaments of his self-realization disappeared, he transfers the entire weight of his essential self to the other, that is the place, the town.

This town's dynamics are transformed by the sudden arrival of two strangers who were discovered one morning at the station. For this small community their arrival alone represents an unsettling occurrence. They upset the normal rhythm of the town or, at least, the station. People in town react to these two foreigners, Sava and his daughter Katia, in accordance with their already presented world-views. Adele, for example, cannot help but use her imagination, enticing her to invent all (im)possible and adventurous scenarios for the newcomers' identities that correspond to the own daydreams: "They might be … Or she could be a journalist … on the trail of a hot story …," and "You never know. Maybe … or … maybe they're travelling incognito. On the run … spies, criminals, gun runners from Libya. Maybe they're supplying freedom fighters or terrorist factions in … England … with plastic explosives and mortars … maybe she's wanted by Interpol … maybe she's responsible for hundreds of deaths in dozens of cities …" (9). As travellers they engage her imagination, making her well disposed toward them.

Fret dislikes them from the outset since they bring an unsettling change to his routine. In his systematic and methodical nature, anything out of the ordinary provides a cause for concern. He thus rants "I don't care who they are they can't loiter on my platform … we're not a bloody youth hostel," and "It's a breach of regulations," and "I don't know … I'm not sure but it can't be allowed to continue" (ibid.). In this sense Fret is quite similar to the younger men in town who identify with the firm and unchanging character of their small town. Any change is unsettling, potentially dangerous and unwelcome because the residents identify the stability of their routine with civilized order, they assume that the foreigners could threaten that order. Such a realization is offered by Fret when he furiously exclaims (all in capital letters) that "THIS IS NOT A GYPSY ENCAMPMENT" (11). Gypsies are an inherent risk because they lack a firm connection to one place. These intolerant outbursts are definitely and quintessentially a "European" phenomenon. Further outbursts of Fret's anger divulge this xenophobic attitude:

Fret:	[…] Show me your tickets.
	[…]
Katia:	We don't have any tickets.

Fret: How do you expect to get on a train without proper tickets?

Katia: We expect nothing.

[...]

Fret: You expect nothing?

Katia: Nothing.

[...]

Fret: Stay there! Inter-railers – travelling about without a bloody destination ...expecting nothing ... letting it happen ... getting on and off trains with complete disregard for the principle of the thing.

[...]

Fret: Expect nothing! ... It's a passenger's job to expect something, it's a civic responsibility ... when you stop expecting anything from people you're only a step away from anarchism. Give me your pass, show me your pass! (12-13)

Fret's logic in the above passage is obvious although he is making huge leaps in reasoning such as those between civil obedience and essential identity. Therefore, it is not hard to imagine with what suspicion, even fear, the two newcomers are met by the inhabitants. To make the situation even more grotesque, Greig really severs both Sava's and Katia's ties with their past. They, in fact, are from "nowhere." Although in his dialogues with Fret, Sava mentions first a reference to a known political figure ("Tito was a railwayman," 48), which is not totally correct, he mentions also a geographical name ("In the yards at Knin we did it once," 52) identifying himself with a place.[14]

Sava's disclosure is in complete opposition to his daughter Katia's perception of her situation. She sees herself as completely detached from a geographical and, consequently, also an emotional and mental past. In this way she, in effect, diametrically opposes the views held by the majority of the inhabitants of the small town. It is only Adele who still finds her statements plausible. Therefore she has to enquire:

Adele:	Where do you come from?
Katia:	Does it matter?
Adele:	I'm only asking.
Katia:	I'm not sure.
Adele:	Not sure?
Katia:	Like I said. I'm not sure.
Adele:	But. You must know. Everyone knows where they come from.
Katia:	The place I came from isn't there any more. It disappeared. (37)

Sava's admission to Fret sheds additional light on Katia's declarations. Thus he admits "You know they … She was …assaulted. She was … A lot of people were assaulted … but … I think she was …" (77). That is why the only possible way for her to survive these horrifying nightmares is to eradicate the site of trauma from her memory. Her home, as Katia admits, has no fixity in her imagination: "It had a number of names. None of them stuck" (38). It used to be the same kind of town as the one where the current events are taking place. The parallel can be easily established between both places in Katia's admission that "It looked like a small town. The sort of place people come from. Not the sort of place they go to, particularly" (38). This statement suggests that any small town can serve as a point of reference for self-identification. Unless the city "turns against" its inhabitants and stops offering security. In the case of the present small town an economic crisis severs the ties, whereas in Katia's case a war is responsible. The town ceases to be the place to which one used to belong and served as the source of identification. It changes together with its residents. Katia avers that "I didn't recognize it the last time I saw it. Its appearance had changed considerably. It was difficult to tell if it was the same place" (38), and further "It reminded me of a relative whose face had been torn off" (ibid.). Together with the place Katia's memories of the past, all that constructed her as Katia, are gone. What then happens to the inhabitants? What do they invoke when they say "I"? It is difficult to imagine a more acutely posited problem of

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[14] The name discloses a town in the no longer existing Serbian enclave in central Croatia.

identity. The post-traumatic quality of experience only adds a sinister twist to the plot, since one of the clinically proved consequences of the post-traumatic crisis is precisely de-identification with the past or, better still, with the own self from the past.[15]

Adele: Tell me … tell me your life story.

Katia: I don't have a life story. I'm one of the few people left who doesn't. (53)

It is no wonder then that Katia, once dissociated from the place, loses a great deal of interest in identifying with it. She cannot identify with the external nor with the personal, internal circumstances. Moreover, the firm, steady and stable place is linked in her memory to her traumatic experience of abuse, suffering and, therefore, of permanent change. This is the reason why she refuses to recognize herself as a member of a larger (ethnic) group or as a resident of a certain town and therefore cannot see her subjectivity as being dependent on any of these conditions.

I described above the circumstances for the initial formation of the protagonists' subjectivities in *Europe*. Yet these primary conditions, so heavily engrained in their subjective identities, have been forcibly altered. Economic development on the one hand and war on the other have, to a varying degree, influenced these characters. What Greig explores in his play are the transformations of the protagonists' subjectivities through their actions. Again, one should be reminded that the Aristotelian discrepancy between the character and his/her action is but a logical fallacy, usefully demonstrated by the philosophy of tragedy. Thus, each of the characters reacts to the loss of primary identification in a way that corresponds to his/her personal experience.

Fret, who has previously expressed his allegiance to the orderly and structured life and rejected both newcomers, has discovered in Sava a fellow railwayman equally familiar with an ordered past. Sava declares: "It's a funny thing, Mr. Fret, but in my experience a railwayman is a railwayman wherever you go. We speak the same language, we think the same way" (48). After this revelation, it is not difficult for Fret to accept the refugee as an equal and, moreover, as a friend. In their case, their common work experience is more important than the ethnic differences. The two men also meet on a

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[15] Cf. especially Brenneis, Caruth, Haaken, and Van der Kolk's contributions to the topic.

different level. For Fret the station and his position there have been sacred. He has admitted to perceiving his function as that of a high priest in the sanctuary of a "railway god" or "God as railwayman." He cannot move on for two reasons: firstly, he is not young any more and, secondly, he has devoted his entire life to the station. This is another common point between the two men. As Sava contends, he and Katia have "been blown around from place to place for a long time and this is where we've come to rest. For now. The fault is neither yours nor ours but belongs to the random chaotic winds of current events" (14). He too did not want to leave his home despite the looming danger of war. For Sava this was the matter of self-respect and identification with certain basic human laws and norms. Like Fret, he believes that if things are done properly and conscientiously, truth and justice will be on his side. He does not let any one "underestimate human nature" (25) even if the price he and his family have to pay is atrocious.

It is on the basis of this deep-seated conviction that the two men decide not to tear themselves away from the world they have known despite the changes it has undergone. Sava, in particular, identifies with the view that men are in general good and that civilization will eventually prevail. His own identity rests on the principle "never [to] give in to animalism, to barbarism" (26). Idealist to the core, Sava, despite the fact that his belief has once already been proved so disastrously wrong, cannot get rid of this positive perception. As he admits to Katia, "we're not in some savage country on the other side of the world. Look around you, look at the architecture [...] We're a long way from home but we're still in Europe. We'll be looked after. Our situation will be understood" (25). Even more clearly his view is captured by Katia who, although kindly, indirectly accuses him, "Europe. Snipers on the rooftops, mortars in the suburbs and you said: "This is Europe ... we must stay in Europe." So we stayed, even after the food ran out: "This is Europe." When the hospitals were left with nothing but alcohol and dirty bandages ... I warned you and you still said: "This is Europe ... honesty will prevail, sense will win ... this war is an aberration ... a tear in the fabric. In time it'll be sewn up again and things will look as good as new" (25). Sava's optimistic belief combined with his static nature make him lose perspective.

Sava was never eager to leave his own town. In the end, he was forced out. Now, after lengthy wanderings he has become "tired of plans" (24) and found a place in which he feels well: "A station's as good a place as any. I like stations. They make me feel at home" (24). Thus he decides to stay with Fret who ends up realizing "That's all that'll be left of us. The home you thought you had, the place you thought you came from, the person you thought you were … whoosh! Whoosh! Gone past. Dust in the breeze. By the time they think to turn up it'll already be gone" (72). Embittered by this realization and desperate to make his feelings known, following Sava's advice, Fret decides to organize a sit-in demonstration; a peaceful protest against the injustices of the world. Fret has not left his home, nor does he have any such inclination. Sava, of a similar subjectivity, also never had thought to leave, so now he decides to link himself once again with one place. The two characters' subjectivities may be perceived as static, traditional(ist). Yet because of their innate Idealism, they are open to advancement of society but naive about the basic benevolence of human nature. Both men do not perceive themselves as being threatened by those who dislike the foreignness and novelty. Thus, even if in principle traditionalist, their idea of identity is, because it is based on Idealism, inclusive, accepting and credulous. It is their utter gullibility and blindness as to the matters of the world that make Sava and Fret pay a hefty price in the end.

A different kind of subjectivity has previously been attributed to Berlin and his cronies. Through work, the starting point for identification, it spreads over to the identification with the town. Sooner rather than later, the place became an essential reference for self-realization. From among them it is only Billy who can see the severity of the situation and has enough stamina to leave. When he talks to his friends, "We should all leave. Get out … split up … look around" (21), they see this as first-class treason and breach of solidarity. It is no wonder, then, that the "survival philosophy," such as that laid out by Billy appears completely foreign to them. They do not manage to see it even when he tells them that "Losers stick together … crowds – sheep … that's sticking together … not me. No way … I'm on my own" (22).

There is a similarity between Fret and Sava on the one hand and among the young men on the other. They all identify with the place. Yet contrary to Fret's and Sava's inclusive, open and embracing identification with the place, theirs is one of exclusion and

rejections. Their reasoning is based on the premise that it is their birth-right to stay in their own town, have work and, consequently, a decent existence. Unfortunately, these are the matters of the past. Therefore, any ideology that professes the return to the ideal past, the purification of the present time and space at the expense of the "non-pure" elements in society is greeted by them as the true religion. Such is the identification or, better yet, self-realization by exclusion and by negation:

Horse:	They give all the jobs to the Somalis and the Ethiopians. It's true.
Billy:	Who's "they," Horse?
Horse:	The left.
Berlin:	The dirty anarchists. The Jews and the gyppos. The blacks and the browns.
Billy:	I see.
Berlin:	Polluters of the nation.
Horse:	We didn't used to have them, Billy, there didn't used to be foreigners here. Now we've blocks full of them. Five to a room. (55)

It is only a small surprise, then, that this kind of identification makes out of Berlin and Horse the followers of what has in Europe become to be known as *Blut und Boden* ideology. All of a sudden, Berlin and Horse decide that they want "to discuss community issues … that's all … A bit of tidying up we want done. We've had a meeting. It's been agreed" (64). It has been agreed to get rid of the foreigners, the "polluters of the nation," those who take jobs earned with hard work from the local population. Everybody who is not "us" is "them" and has to be eliminated. Any form of different perspective, such as an inclusive subjectivity, a dream or a desire to reach beyond narrow borders is misunderstood and, at first, barely tolerated, yet later, when the connection between the perspective in case and the "danger" for the community is made it has to be eradicated. Exclusivist identification with "blood and earth," "elitist" self-realization of "us" versus "them" is a welcome ideology in moments of crisis precisely because of its simplistic and easy-to-swallow reasoning. This element of his new "creed" has not escaped Berlin either:

Berlin: It keeps me off the streets. Besides I like it.

Billy: Why?

Berlin: Because it's dumb.

Billy: Berlin.

Berlin: It's dumb and it's blunt. Because it's beautiful. Because it's better than church.

Billy: You don't believe it any more than I do. You know it's not true.

Berlin: I like believing in things that aren't true. That's what faith is.

Billy: What about the violence?

Berlin. All necessary means in defence of the faith. (56)

The necessary bridge from identification to self-realization through action is thus built. As it has already happened in European states, here too the new situation of crisis calls for the "rescue action" of the "endangered homeland" by those who obstinately identify with this utterly simplified version of patriotism. If for both Fret and Sava their unquestionable loyalty to their vocation made their identities depend on an Idealism, and in Sava's case on almost excessive acceptance of others, the exclusivist identification of the young men with their new beliefs starts with, for example, Horse's "*writing "foreigners out" on the bus stop*" (55), and ends up by murdering those "others." Berlin and Horse end up setting the railway station on fire, killing both railwaymen. Berlin recalls:

> There was just the smallest moment of total silence and we saw the little flame curve through the air … then the familiar sound; the pleasant, reassuring sound of bottle on concrete and the flame taking. We ran. We ran into the forest (81),

and further

> From the forest we stood and watched it go up. It seemed like seconds to me. Less than seconds. Like a bomb. There was no stopping it. On the news the fireman said the station was a tinderbox. He said it was criminal.

> Criminal that it could have been left in that condition. They didn't have a chance he said. No one stood a chance in that place. Criminal (ibid.).

Their static identification with an external source combined with their flawed judgement in human benevolence led Fret and Sava to such a tragic ending. Their position is tragic in two respects. Firstly, both men find themselves in a dead-end situation. Even though they did not have any direct influence on the development of the world and, consequently, on their own positions, they were nonetheless placed under its influence. And secondly, at issue is the irresolvability of the situation, based on their hubris, that is their erroneous judgement. They had a possibility to move on, to withdraw, or to stop being "noticeable" yet they did not choose this path. To the contrary, they drew attention to themselves by putting up the protest through which they attracted attention. Their death itself does not present a resolution to the problem but only a cessation of the conflict. The basic problem of xenophobia and hatred of strangers remains. Even if the perpetrators of this violence are punished and eliminated, the underpinning neo-nazi ideology that incites them would continue to exist as part of the political spectrum, readily identifiable in contemporary Europe. This is why Greig concludes his play with Berlin's daunting words about the rest of the world, namely "They know that, in our own way, we're also Europe" (85).

As we have seen, subjectivity defined through its static identification with place or race has utterly failed in both of its exclusive and inclusive appearances. Nonetheless, Greig offers a third, quite different exit from this equation. Such is the case of Katia and Adele. Because of her past experience Katia has a strong premonition of what is to come. She is rightfully fearful that what Sava and herself have experienced might repeat itself. She realizes that "We shouldn't have stopped. We were safer travelling. Keeping moving," and further "We'll end up stuck here. At least while we were hidden we were flexible. We had the chance to move on," as well as "Now we're out in the open" (23). Moving on entails also moving to a bigger city that offers a better chance to hide and survive. She admits that "In a bigger place we can get lost. […] First we need to get out of here. Berlin maybe … Paris … Milan. Somewhere big, I'm not sure yet. I just know we can't stay here. It's too small. We're too visible" (24). Both Katia and Sava have been exposed to such a behaviour and escaped only by some miracle. Thus, Katia explains, "If

I seem in a hurry to leave it's because people who stay too long in one place get noticed. People who get noticed get punished" (67). In addition to following its own logic, this theory uncannily reminds one of that of Roberto Zucco. Their goals are identical. Roberto and Katia want to become "invisible." Invisibility enables them to stay themselves and to survive. What they differ in is the means by which they chose to attain invisibility. While Roberto eliminates the obstacles, thus drawing attention to himself, Katia chooses to flee.

It is in this sense that Adele sees eye to eye with Katia. This is obvious in Adele's rejecting Berlin's static and, most of all, simplistic perception of reality, because, as she states, "Nothing's "how it is" (45). She rejects out of hand his vision of eternal stability and an order based on it, therefore opting for a dynamic resolution to the problem. As she tells her husband, "I live in the world, Berlin. A world with million of things in … But not you. You're here. If you can't see it it doesn't exist. If it's over the horizon no one lives there" (45-6). Despite different reasons for which she chooses this path, like Katia, she opts for movement away from home, or the town to which her identity has been linked.

Yet there is a difference in the two women's sense of self. Mindful of her past existence Katia tries to lay it bare to Adele, "You should be happy with what you've got. Stay where you fit in. Stay at home. You're lucky you've got one. I've got nothing" (49). Katia's statement can be also read between the lines as her own disassociation from a place, especially the one called "home." Katia's subjectivity is limited only to her individual self since she has no memory of home. She is who *she is* regardeless of the place in which she finds herself. Her self-realization is thus limited solely to the physical sense of her own being. But she understands Adele's dilemma: "You can't just attach yourself to someone and leave. You can't do it. Your place is here, Adele. Believe me, I know" (62). She does not want to take the responsibility for taking care for Adele on her shoulders. Because, as she avers, "I've found solidarity often just means more people get hurt … and what's the point of that?" (75).

Katia would be, of course, right if Adele also shared the same identification with home as Berlin and his colleagues. But this is not the case. Despite having passed all her life in one place, Adele has never belonged there either. Her self-realization has been contingent on her dreams: "I was born here by mistake. I didn't choose it. It happened to

me. Like a car accident. You think you know me but you don't. You don't know the first thing about me. I'm not what you think I am, Katia. You've never seen me before" (62). She also declares to Katia: "You've lost your home and I've never had one. So we're both exiles" (ibid.). Adele and Katia are, then, very much alike. These are the reasons why the two women end up in a homoerotic embrace.

They leave indeed in order not to be noticed ever again, not to be pinpointed and destroyed. Although gnawed by a guilty conscience for having left her father behind: "And it's easier when your own …to go unnoticed. To look after yourself. To slip past guards …It's best he stayed. He seemed happy. did you think he was happy?" (82), Katia is convinced she has made a right decision: "It was the right thing to leave. That's the main thing. It was the right decision" (83). She is right. It *was* a right decision. Thus, when Berlin and Horse were creeping in the dead of the night towards the station to set it ablaze, annihilating lives similar to theirs, Katia and Adele optimistically chant their new "prayer" consisting of the names of the places they will travel to. Their chant encapsulates a dynamic subjectivity:

Adele:	Paris … we'll go to Paris … for the romance … […] Milan … we'll go to Milan.
Katia:	Maybe.
Adele:	Or Prague …
[…]	
Adele:	We'll go to Moscow …
Katia.	We could go to Petersburg. (83)
[…]	
Adele:	To Venice.
Katia:	To Rome.
[…]	
Katia:	To Rotterdam.
Adele:	To Copenhagen.
[…]	
Adele:	Sofia.
Katia:	Budapest.

[...]

Adele: Barcelona.

Katia: Marseilles.

[...]

Adele: Athens.

Katia: Hamburg.

[...]

Adele: Salzburg.

Katia: Sarajevo. (84)

The conflict between the modes of existence, two kinds of subjectivity, the static and the dynamic one, leads again to the exposition of the tragic situation. As stated above, for all of them, the present situation is unavoidable. Similarly, for all of them it is also irresolvable. The two kinds of the static subjectivity do end up differently: the inclusive one gets eradicated while the exclusive one celebrates. Yet this is a Phyrric victory. In normal society extremist stances are considered criminal and have to be eliminated. Thus a fixed and stagnant identity leads to either crime or punishment. The dynamic form of subjectivity embodied by Katia and Adele, despite its survival, has no other possibility but to keep moving.

Still, the fundamental difference is in the quality of this self-realization. The static one is subject to destruction while the dynamic one, uprooted and eternally displacing, denotes survival. His/her destiny should never become stable because as soon as this happens he/she is prone to the same fate as any permanent subjectivity. There exists no other solution but the never-ending repetition. Or, to repeat Foucault once again, "il s'agit d'ôter au sujet (ou à son substitut) son rôle de fondement originaire, et de l'analyser comme une fonction variable et complexe" (1994, 811).

5.4 Tony Kushner, *Angels in America*

The most advanced form of subjectivity in terms of its disassociation from the absolute self is found in Kushner's famous dramatic diptych *Angels in America: A Gay*

Fantasia on National Themes. Written in the form of two separate plays, *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*, it is meant to be read as a whole connected through the protagonists as well as their destinies. Commissioned by the *Eureka Theatre Company* in San Francisco as a two-part set, it was also premiered by the Company in May 1991. Although forming a whole, each of the two plays has a very distinct characteristic. Whereas the first, that is *Millennium Approaches*, is specifically oriented to the individual destinies of the protagonists and is therefore quite dramatic, the second part loses the dramatic fibre through shifting the emphasis from singular destinies to broader, political issues. Moreover, it is conceived as a saga-like continuation of the first part and less independent as a play in its own right. In fact, by being surprisingly narrative and linear, *Perestroika* has even less of a dramatic structure than *Millennium Approaches*. The idiosyncratic bend is thus lost and with it also its essential theatricality. Its role seems to be rather an exposition of the author's *Weltanschauung*, as Kushner avers, through the "radical potential the marriage of art and politics has to offer" (II: 153). Consequently, *Perestroika* is burdened with a "belief in the effectiveness of activism and the possibility of progress" (II: 154). It is performative, similar to a thesis-play, oriented towards forwarding an idea(l) or making a point. In line with his admittedly "leftist" perspective, Kushner sees this process only as a communal effort. As he points out, he is opposed to the uncritical support of the individual: "We pay high prices for the maintenance of the myth of the Individual" (II: 150).

Nevertheless, in my opinion individuality should not be confused with subjectivity that necessarily is as foundation for a solipsist as well as for a communal action. Subjectivity is politically neutral because it defines a human being on a totally different, much more rudimentary level, that is prior to the protagonist's political engagement. My objective with regard to subjectivity is to look for a theoretical support to Lévinas, advocating the ethical and to a certain extent deontological and performative form of subjectivity. Zima, too, can be named in this connection since he drew attention to the subject's dialogical "essence." Still, one should be careful not to confuse Lévinas's idea with a simple goal-oriented action. His is the theory of the human essence, the form of subjectivity that provides the conditions for self-realization. These two notions operate on very different levels. In fact, Lévinas's subjectivity has nothing to do with the

teleology of a concrete action. It is the essence of the subject defined through the medium of ethics, an entity that makes a human being exist only for and through the "other." It is both, reflexive and performative, passive and active, inbound and outbound, geared towards the cognition of the self and others. *Perestroika* does not offer this deeper insight. By presenting the effort of a group of people who selflessly help each other overcome the differences that divided them in the first play, the "message" of the play is upbeat and positive. It works as an *addendum*. This was achieved by shifting the emphasis to the characters' exterior. The political outlook of *Perestroika* is that of progress and linear development, which is why Kushner can claim that "in dialogue, we created the optimistic heart of the plays" (II: 157). It is for this reason that I find the second part of *Angels in America* only of a limited usefulness for my specific analysis of development of subjectivity.

Millennium Approaches is organized around individual destinies of a handful of characters not concerned with broader social and political issues over their own lives. The exposition of individual characters (not groups, as in *Perestroika*) and their personal fights (not communal efforts) in their lives give *Millennium Approaches* the appropriate precondition for a more particularized exposition. Furthermore, its direction of development is not, as in *Perestroika*, progressive but, rather, regressive. Still, at the end, Kushner uses the principle of *deus ex machina*, that is the Angel in order to bring the play away from the point of no return.

Millennium Approaches is not a typically progressive play, anchored in the Aristotelian temporal and topical present both developing in front of the audience. It does not follow the traditional structure of Freytag's dramatic pyramid. Rather, *Millennium Approaches* represents only its later, devolutionary sequence. The play lacks a central and crucial conflict. Kushner's play can be likened to *Doc* in that the most significant events represented in it took place in the past and the protagonists are left waiting for the final absorption of the consequences. But there is a structural difference between *Doc*, laid out in the past and playing out the dynamics between past and present, and *Millennium Approaches*, which does not incorporate the past into the web of the present. In this sense *Millennium Approaches* is a very straightforward and linear play with the emphasis on the present and a regressive direction. Compositionally *Millennium Approaches*

represents only the winding down of the action, the last moments before the final catastrophe, structurally akin to the configuration of a one-act play. In Freytag's terms of classical scholarship on drama, only the "falling movement" and the "catastrophe" have remained, while the "introduction," the "rising movement" and the "climax" have all been left out.

Moreover, since the progressive action is in fact successfully eliminated, there is very little space left for anything but a waiting game that happens through the dialogue. Dialogue *per se*, of course, is the fundament of dramatic plays, usually pregnant with consequences leading to action. But in the case of the *Millennium Approaches*, where there is only the idle sequence left, the dialogue has an essentially different function: it is a dialogue of recognition, self-constitution and, therefore, an "empty" dialogue that does not set in motion any subsequent action. Therefore, it is a "dialogue for the sake of a dialogue" because there is nothing else left for the protagonists but the acceptance of the consequences of their previous deeds. Still, *Millennium Approaches* should be read as a regular play in which action is determined chronologically, that is diachronically and not synchronically, as in *Doc*, because what Kushner represents is the actual stage-present without any recourses to previous times.

Since no actions ensue from the verbal interactions, the previously underscored unity of the protagonist's character and his/her actions is also endangered. While in all earlier discussed plays the protagonists' deeds only confirmed their characters, this cannot be taken for granted in *Millennium Approaches*. In the first place, it cannot be automatically presumed because there is no way to either prove or disprove the content of their characters. In other words, there is no action on the protagonists' part confirming or rejecting their verbally established essence. Or, better still, the only proof of their subjectivity is their own intellectual self-realization, self-identification instead of a usually present action that would normally follow the words. Secondly, this traditional equilibrium is disturbed also because of the fact that the type of subjectivity, which Kushner presents in *Millennium Approaches*, is quite different from the usual, developmental, teleological one. There is no need for a "firm" external confirmation of the protagonists' characters, as normally situated in action. Protagonists who do not act

and thus prove to be consistent with what they claim to be are necessarily bound to depend only on their verbal expressions.

The main issue is the utterly pointless and absurd suffering, as is waiting for an incurable illness to take its toll. Yet it is necessary to state that this suffering is not the pain of an "everyman." The protagonists were intentionally placed in very specific situations that all have to do with either being subject to, or a bystander in, a process of falling prey to an incurable disease. According to traditional scholarship on tragedy, this play lacks the momentum of the key concept of hubris. Since the complete embrace of some of the Aristotelian concepts of tragedy in contemporary drama cannot reflect the contemporary reality of the dramatic components, one should proceed with great caution. Most obviously, Kushner's subjects do not need actions to prove who they are. They are interested in the consequences of their previous deeds that are not important at all. Thus the question of guilt is completely eliminated. What concerns Kushner's protagonists is their intellectual, emotional, even ethical and political reaction.

The protagonists interrogate themselves *ex post* about the ontology and teleology, ethics and eschatology. Because of their unavoidability these questions are filled with a shocking resonance. The stress shifts from its traditional position on subject's actions to a different one on the subject's self, from "what" to "who." The "self" in Kushner's play is expressed solely through the verbal medium. The dialogue is their only (self-)reference through which they become aware of themselves.

This specific approach to subjectivity brings Kushner theoretically close to Lévinas and Zima. Zima, in light of a post-deconstructive effort to re-establish subjectivity, advances the idea of "dialogicalness" as the one that has replaced the previously predominant dialectical model (cf. section 4.4). In this principle the "other" serves as a mirror for oneself. Such an "echo-location," similarly to the principle of radar, returns to the emitter the information about him/herself. In other words, it provides the medium as well as the condition for self-awareness and self-constitution. A further quality of this dialogical process is that it remains on the plane of a basically binary

opposition and does not evolve into a dialectical spiral.[16] As I mentioned above, Zima borrows Bürger's concept of the "monologic" structure of modernist subjectivity only to further develop it into its postmodern "dialogic" counterpart. Basically, the dialogic process of subjectivity is that of self-realization, that of "Identitätssuche" (Zima, 2000 xi). Yet this self-realization cannot be complete without the identification of the "other." The engagement in a dialogue is supposed to take care of this shortcoming. In Zima's words: "ein individuelles Subjekt nur im Komunikationszusammenhang zu verstehen ist, in dem es anderen Subjekten dialogisch-polemisch begegnet" (2000, 11).

Such a stance leads automatically, as I have already demonstrated, back to Lévinas and his reconstruction of contemporary subjectivity. Lévinas too emphasises the constant movement between the self and the self-as-the-other. It is only this movement that fundamentally enables the identification and also self-realization. Our contemporary world, in his opinion, cannot be described through the concepts engrained in idealist philosophy, such as the ideas of the absolute and totality but should rather be perceived as a part of a non-finite process. Everything thus becomes relational but not desubstantialized, even the concept of subject.

Kushner's characters fit into such a conception of a present-day subjectivity. This relation can be seen by way of their identification with themselves in a position where there is no exit. *Millennium Approaches* is a tragic play because the usually infinite, endlessly relational subjectivities are caught in a non-relational, that is rigid and mono-directional space. This occurs precisely because of their faulty reasoning that results in their inability to constitute themselves. In order to reach self-realization they have to be in a constant movement, but once normal developmental path forward is blocked. Therefore, some of these protagonists start to regress. Furthermore, regardless which direction they choose, the realization of their miserable lives leaves an increasingly noticeable imprint on them. This futile resistance is well emphasized in the epigraph that

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[16] In this sense also a monologue should be considered a dialogue, only with the same emitter and receiver. Yet in Kushner's work there is no need for such a detailed division since even in the case of a solitary person talking to him/herself these monologues are given the form of a dream-like hallucination and thus become a conversation with an imagined character.

Kushner draws from Stanley Kunitz's verses from *The Testing-Tree*: "In a murderous time / the heart breaks and breaks / and lives by breaking" (7).

The end in the case of the *Millennium Approaches* is nothing less than death. Yet, not death that could be dubbed "heroic" but a "mundane" succumbing to AIDS, the disease that has already been named "the plague of the twentieth century." To aggravate the situation even further and to make it cruelly and blindly nonsensical, Kushner's characters are regular everyday people whose only "sin" and "offence" is that they are homosexuals. In the late eighties, when *Millennium Approaches* was written and the play's action is also dated to take place in "October-November 1985" (9), people finally became aware of the frightening consequences of AIDS. Kushner, himself openly admitting to being gay, skilfully represents a homosexual microcosm in which he exposes the dynamics of different relationships under the threat of AIDS.

The dynamics involve a gay couple, Louis and Prior, a married heterosexual couple, Joe and Harper, and a closet gay lawyer Roy Cohn. After Prior's realization about his state, Louis initially pledges to help him. Yet, when things start getting "ugly," he leaves his partner to his own solitary and desolate fate. Parallel to this development, a Mormon heterosexual couple, Harper and Joe, are trying to make sense of their marriage. On the surface, their existence is reminiscent of any couple in a big city. Yet their relationship is affected by the husband's utter disinterest in his wife, and her desperate longing for his affection and recognition. Joe's fight is an internal one against his Mormon upbringing and his sexual orientation. Finally, a powerful lawyer Roy Cohn prides himself on being the most influential person who controls his and many other lives. He adopts the attitude of an *Übermensch*. Yet his problem is that he is "The Killer Queen Herself. New York's number-one closeted queer" (II: 26) who is also infected with HIV.

When the play opens most of the above has already happened. Prior and Roy have both fallen ill, although have not realized it yet. Once they are affected by the disease, their relationship becomes strained. They begin reflecting on themselves and their relationship. Thus it is not the action that is the most important but, rather, a reflection on oneself, values, and life in the face of the premature death. They appear passive and their ruminations provide their only basis for self-constitution. Instead of deeds, *words* become

sole carriers of meaning. Once uttered, they are attributed the factuality of actions. It is through words that these characters live, love, and hurt each other.

Probably the most striking example of the self-constitution through words is Roy M. Cohn, "*a successful New York lawyer and unofficial power broker*" (3). In addition to his vocation, where words mean even more than actions, he literally functions solely through the verbal channel. His main tool is a telephone and by pushing the buttons to switch among his interlocutors he switches between his identities as well as his realities. He himself induces a frenzy of speech, feeding his desire for different personalities. He brings them into existence by uttering them, speaking them aloud. Kushner introduces him while he is conducting "*business with great energy, impatience and sensual abandon: gesticulating, shouting, crooning, playing the phone, receiver and hold button with virtuosity and love*" (11). Roy throws himself into communicaton, intensely partaking of every situation and every dialogue:

> (*Button*) Yah? Who is *this*? Well who the fuck are *you*? Hold – (*Button*) Harry? Eighty-seven grand, something like that. Fuck him. Eat me. [...] That's – Harry, that's the beauty of the law. (*Button*) So, baby doll, what? *Cats*? Bleah. (*Button*) *Cats*! It's about cats. Singing cats, you'll love it. Eight o'clock, the theatre's always at eight. (*Button*) Fucking tourists. (*Button, then to Joe*) Oh live a little, Joe, *eat* something for Christ sake– (13).

For Roy, words are the essential carriers of reality, more so than even the actions. This is the basis of his failure to grasp the meaning of his disease as well as come to terms with it. It is hard, if not completely impossible, for him to realize the objectivity of words. Put differently, that other people's words have some impact too. He explains this philosophy in *Part II* by saying that "Lawyers are ... the High Priests of America. We alone know the words that made America. Out of thin air. We alone know how to use The Words" (II: 89). Therefore, he believes that if he does not state something, the thing does not exist. On the basis of this cognitive predisposition, Roy cannot accept his physician's clinical description of his illness because the doctor's words "cannot reach" him. He rebukes the physician: "This is very interesting, Mr. Wizard, but why the fuck are you telling me this" (I: 43). The words about his illness are only that, the words about

an illness. They cannot be about Roy M. Cohn. Only the social groups that are at risk are "Homosexuals and drug addicts. So why are you implying that I … (*Pause*) What are you implying, Henry?" (ibid.). And further, "No, say it. I mean it. Say: "Roy Cohn, you are a homosexual" (*Pause*). And I shall proceed, systematically, to destroy your reputation and your practice and your career in New York State, Henry" (I: 44). If the words have not been spoken, better yet, if Roy M. Cohn has not spoken them, the problem would not exist. Furthermore, Roy is going to do everything to prevent these words from being uttered, thereby denying the problem's very existence. Roy Cohn believes that because of his social status he can resist the power of labels and identities he detests:

> Your problem, Henry, is that you are hung up on words, on labels, that you believe they mean what they seem to mean. AIDS. Homosexual. Gay. Lesbian. You think these are names that tell you who someone sleeps with, but they don't tell you that. […] No. Like all labels they tell you one thing and one thing only: where does an individual so identified fit in the food chain, in the pecking order? Not ideology, or sexual taste, but something much simpler: clout. […] This is what a label refers to. […] Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a pissant antidiscrimination bill through City Council. Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows. Who have zero clout. (I: 45).

He confuses his own reality with his power over words. Contrary to homosexuals described in such a way, Roy has a "lot of clout." He further admonishes his physician: "I don't want you to be impressed. I want you to understand. This is not a sophistry. And this is not hypocrisy. This is reality" (I: 46).

This clinging to his own power of manipulating words is anchored in his belief that human beings are constituted and defined by their social position. His theory works perfectly for him because what he thinks he is, is contingent on where he is placed on the social ladder. Since the system works, there is no need for readjustment. Roy is fundamentally convinced that (social) power can inform human essence. This in turn denies an absolute subjectivity that would be independent from superficial experience. As Roy sees it, his subjectivity depends on his placement in society that is usually constructed and maintained through the verbal medium. Thus, it is basically the words

that construct a human being and not the other way around. He, then, is what he says he is and whom he says he knows. Saying, uttering a statement appears thus to be a primary ontological mechanism. Roy confirms this in an eloquent manner "Because *what* I am is defined entirely by *who* I am. Roy Cohn is not a homosexual. Roy Cohn is a heterosexual man, Henry, who fucks around with guys" (ibid.).

It is necessary to state that Roy is unique in his understanding of the self-constitution of his subjectivity. No other character in *Millennium Approaches* has been endowed with such a potent identification of the self and the world. Other characters such as the gay couple, Louis Ironson, "*a word processor working for the Second Circuit Court of Appeal*," and his partner Prior Walter, who "*Occasionally works as a club designer or caterer, otherwise lives very modestly but with great style off a small trust fund*" (3) lead modest lives not informed by such self-agrandizment. Therefore, they have to play the game of make-believe.

Prior is also stricken with the disease. When showing his arm to Louis after the funeral of Louis's grandmother, he openly admits: "K.S., baby. Lesion number one. Lookit. The wine-dark kiss of the angel of death" and also "I'm a lesionnaire. The Foreign Lesion. The American Lesion. Lesionnaire's disease" (I: 21). There is absolutely no doubt in his mind that he is going to die and that his physical body is fatally ill. Although what Prior faces is only the terrible weight of waiting for his body to fall apart, he still thinks about holding on to essential human honour and decency. His major concern therefore is "Don't you think I'm handling this well? I'm going to die" (ibid.).

This attitude proves his basic rootedness in the world of finite values where everything has a concrete meaning, an individual limit and where there is no room for a personal epistemological creativeness. The meaning of the empirical approach to life and existence in Prior's case should be clearly laid out. He is a person who sticks with the concretes of life, such as taking care of pets (his favoured was a cat Little Sheba that unfortunately ran away), providing for his every day life and small pleasures, never being interested in eschatological questions. All Prior is interested in was, while not caring for any particular ideologies or beliefs, to live his life in a pleasurable and appropriate way. He explains his *Lebensphilosophie* in a monologue directed to the audience: "One wants to move through life with elegance and grace, blossoming infrequently but with exquisite

taste, and perfect timing, like a rare bloom, a zebra orchid … One wants … But one so seldom gets what one wants, does one? No. One does not. One gets fucked. Over. One … dies at thirty, robbed of … decades of majesty. Fuck this shit. Fuck this shit. […] I look like a corpse. A corpsette. Oh my queen; you know you've hit rock-bottom when even drag is a drag" (I: 30-1). He fights with the ordinary meaning, which he never was able to tailor according to his own needs. In such a sense, his needs and actions are far from realizable. He is not, as Roy, in charge of the meaning and, therefore, the essence but depends on the meaning created by other powers. Prior, as Roy, is extremely sensitive to the issue of powers, which dictate to him what to think and, consequently, how to live. He has been very sensitive to his passive position in society that becomes aggravated with the surge of his illness.

He can no more even pretend to be somebody else since even his drags are recognizable and visible. For a man whose entire sense of existence depended on the possibility to shift into a parallel world and into a pretence of reality, the impossibility of continuing to do so has devastating consequences. Yet what really counts for this "down-to-earth" man is the relationship he has with Louis, his "mirror soul." Hence his worries after revealing him his incurable state:

Prior: I couldn't tell you.

Louis: Why?

Prior: I was scared, Lou.

Louis: Of what?

Prior: That you'll leave me. (I: 22)

After tending to Prior at the beginning of his illness, Louis finds himself unable to deal with the emotional and physical burden:

Prior: Apartment too small for three? Louis and Prior comfy but not Louis and Prior and Prior's disease?

Louis: Something like that. I won't be judged by you. This isn't a crime, just – the inevitable consequence of people who run out of – whose limitations…

[…]

Louis: You can love someone and fail them. You can love someone and not be able to…

[…]

Prior: (Shattered; almost pleading; trying to reach him) I'm dying! You stupid fuck! Do you know what that is! Love! Do you know what love means? We lived together four-and-a-half years, you animal, you idiot.

Louis: I have to find some way to save myself. (I: 78-9)

In the world of empirical laws inhabited by both men, Prior is rendered completely helpless. Unable to afford his medicine and abandoned by his lover, Prior is sentenced to a lengthy and painful death. Yet, in the darkest moment of his despair, Prior hears a Voice speaking from above: "Look up, look up / prepare the way / the infinite descent / A breath in air / floating down / Glory to…," to which his response is only "Hello? Is that it? Helloooo! What the fuck…? (*He holds himself*) Poor me. Poor poor me. Why me? Why poor poor me?" (I: 35). What has been previously considered a "non-entity" enters now into Prior's life. It is irrelevant to whom does this messenger belongs. The truth is that Prior has been made the object of this visitation. Kushner makes it very obvious that this is not some kind of drug-induced hallucination. It is a full-fledged appearance of an unearthly entity.

Throughout the first part, the messenger exists only through the Voice. It is only at the end of the Part I that he/she announces his/her descent. Were it not for the Part II, its symbolic could be easily understood as the coming of the Angel of Death. In *Perestroika*, however, Prior wrestles with the Angel and is allowed to return to earth. The messenger visits Prior with a special purpose in mind that he/she reveals to him in the following words: "No death, no: A marvellous work and a wonder we undertake, an edifice awry we sink plumb and straighten, a great Lie we abolish, a great error correct, with the rule, sword and broom of Truth!" (I: 62). The messenger wants Prior to partake in this undertaking: "I am on my way; when I am manifest, our Work begins: Prepare for the parting of the air, the breath, the ascent, Glory to…" (ibid.). Thus, agnostic as he is, Prior is chosen to become a prophet of the Truth. Kushner underscores that fact that despite Prior's body being fatally ill, his soul is pure and innocent. Despite and because

of his physiological suffering, Prior is deemed capable of spreading the word of a higher truth. To stress this point, Prior is heard speaking in Hebrew during an exchange with the nurse Emily:

Emily:	Es nishmas Prior sheholoch leolomoh, baavur shenodvoo z'dokoh b'ad hazkoras nishmosoh.
Prior:	Why are you doing that?! Stop it! Stop it!
Emily:	Stop what?
Prior:	You were just … weren't you just speaking in Hebrew or something?
Emily:	Hebrew? (Laughs) I'm basically Italian-American. No. I didn't speak in Hebrew. (I: 98)

Ostensibly, Kushner invokes the "tradition of the Word" in order to place Prior in the succession of the divinely ordained messengers. Prior is thus invited and allowed to enter the kingdom of the Word, which on the one hand saves his life and on the other provides him with a vocation. If, prior to the discovery of prophetic powers, Prior saw himself as "fucked by the truth," then now he becomes its "perpetrator." The word quite literally reconstitutes him and gives him back his life. And all he has to do in order to "make prophecies" is simply to live. Prior's role is firmly set in the framework of Judaic religious tradition in the stage directions: "*Suddenly there is an astonishing blaze of light, a huge chord sounded by a gigantic choir, and a great book with steel pages mounted atop a molten-red pillar pops up from the stage floor. The book opens; there is a large Aleph inscribed on its pages, which bursts into flames. Immediately the book slams shut and disappears instantly under the floor as the lights become normal again*" (I: 99). With that even the most committed agnostic should acknowledge the importance of the Word.

Like all prophets, Prior is represented as considering himself unworthy of transmitting the message of the Word: "I … no, no fear, find the anger, find the … anger, my blood is clean, my brain is fine, I can handle pressure, I am a gay man and I am used to pressure, to trouble, I am tough and strong" (I: 117). In an almost Woody-Allenesque situation the tradition is paraphrased through the optics of the contemporary world – Prior's references belong solely to New York of the late eighties. There is an ironic undertone in the descent of unearthly powers, particularly in Prior's comment, "(*An*

awestruck whisper) God almighty … *Very* Steven Spielberg" (I: 118), and "[…] *as the room reaches darkness, we hear a terrifying CRASH as something immense strikes earth*" (ibid.), and his voice is heard, namely "Greetings, Prophet; / The Great Work begins: / The Messenger has arrived" (I: 119). With these last words of *Part I: Millennium Approaches*, Prior's work is about to begin.

Prior's situation stands in direct contrast to Louis's. If in Prior's case the development went from physical health to illness and from the illness of the soul to full rehabilitation as a prophet, in the case of Louis one can witness exactly the opposite process. Louis draws upon himself all the negative characteristics that Prior sheds. He abandons his grandmother in the old-age home. Louis poses a question of special importance to the Rabbi: "what does the Holy Writ say about someone who abandons someone he loves at a time of great need?" Yet he himself has already an answer ready:

> Because he has to. Maybe because this person's sense of the world, that will change for the better with struggle, maybe a person who has this neo-Hegelian positivist sense of constant historical progress towards happiness or perfection or something, who feels very powerful because he feels connected to these forces, moving uphill all the time … maybe that person can't, um, incorporate sickness into his sense of how things are supposed to go. Maybe vomit … and sores and disease …really frighten him, maybe … he isn't so good with death. (I: 25)

Obviously, Louis's view on life is egotist, hedonist, and falsely aesthetic. There is no room for firm ethical feelings, let alone self-sacrifice. He bases his perspective on utterly elusive aspirations of "happiness" and "perfection." Louis accepts only the ideals of youth, beauty, and strength. while old age, sickness, infirmity and helplessness disgust and repulse him. Because Louis has chosen a superficial ideal he is constantly on the verge of abhorrence: "Life sucks shit. Life … just sucks shit" (I: 28). The fundamental difference between the two men is that even if Prior does not at first believe in transcendence he witnesses, he still follows it to the best of his abilities. Very similar to the quality of ancient hubris, he does not even question it, let alone abandon it for his previous superficially secular existence. Louis, on the contrary, using the same tradition, tries to excuse himself. In such a way, by emphasizing his Jewishness, he has the entire

eschatological system at his service: "Well for us [Jews] it's not the verdict that counts, it's the act of judgment. That's why I could never be a lawyer. In court all that matters is the verdict," or better yet "The shaping of the law, not its execution" (I: 38).

Knowing rather well that the verdict in his case would be unanimous and unequivocal, Louis, although subject to the Law of the Word, tries to skew the perspective so as to redeem himself. For that, the Law has to be turned upside down. When speaking of the judgment that would befit him, he maintains that "it should be the question and shape of a life, its total complexity gathered, arranged and considered, which matters in the end, not some stamp of salvation or damnation which disperses all the complexity in some unsatisfying little decision – the balancing of the scales…" (I: 38-9). Although belonging to the Law, Louis denies it vehemently, while an atheist he becomes the carrier of the Word. Louis rejects the verdict because it would be clearly to his detriment. The Word would become law. This is why he would prefer, if anything at all, only the process of judgement, words without final meaning. Yet even if Louis had his way, his life would still not warrant his absolution. He realizes he is not strong enough and leaves Prior in the midst of his suffering for another man whose appearance is that of "the Marlboro Man" (II: 91). He chooses appearance over substance, the volatility of an affair over constancy of friendship because, as he admits, "I have to find some way to save myself" (I: 79). This is Louis's choice. His way leads him away from the true Word into misery.

Parallel to the story of the two men and, in fact, intertwined with theirs, is the story of a Mormon couple, Joe, that is Joseph Porter Pitt, "*chief clerk for Justice Theodore Wilson of the Federal Court of Appeal, Second Circuit*," and Harper Amaty Pitt, "*Joe's wife, an agoraphobic with a mild Valium addiction*" (I: 3). Not burdened with issues of eschatology, death or survival in the way that the first couple under discussion is, their lives nonetheless linger in the realm of passive suffering. They also fail to name the things with their right names, and thus bring them into existence. I maintain that the connection between "being named" and "existing" is as present here as it was in both previous cases. Joe votes Republican, which is why he believes that it is the political option that may uncover the truth: "That's what President Reagan's done, Harper. He says "Truth exists and can be spoken proudly." And the country responds to him. We

become better. More good. I need to be a part of that, I need something big to lift me up" (I: 26). That is precisely Joe's personal problem. He knows the truth does exist yet he cannot reveal it. Having been raised as a strict Mormon, he denies himself even the possibility of listening to his feelings and admitting to himself that he is gay. His schizophrenic situation is in buying into the "truth issue" yet personally living a terrible and, consequently, destructive lie. He does not allow himself to live as "one of the elect, one of the Blessed" (I: 54) perpetrating a terrible sin. He always wanted to be "someone cheerful and strong. Those who love God with an open heart unclouded by secrets and struggles are cheerful; God's easy simple love for them shows in how strong and happy they are. The saints" (ibid.). Joe was not strong enough to choose truth over lies. This inability to speak the truth clearly damages his relationship with Harper.

His numbness and his inability to name and speak the truth begins to be affected when he meets Louis. The thrill of the experience made him stagger under the weight of the Unspoken and finally brought him to muster enough courage to reveal the truth to his mother:

Hannah:	Joe?
Joe:	Mom. Momma. I'm a homosexual, Momma.
	Boy, did that come out awkward.
	(Pause)
	Hello? Hello?
	I'm a homosexual.
	(Pause)
	Please, Momma. Say something.
	[...]
Hannah:	You're ridiculous. You're being ridiculous.
Joe:	I'm ... What?
Hannah:	You really ought to go home now to your wife. I need to go to bed. This phone call ...We will just forget this phone call. (I: 75-6)

Hannah refuses to hear what her son's words have revealed. Like her son earlier, she would like the words not to be uttered.

Joe knows that his entire life has been lived in a complete untruth. Even Harper realizes it in the end: "You were going to save me, but the whole time you were spinning a lie" (I: 79), revealing thus the ineffability of his orientation between his self and its realization. He was not a truly integrated human being because the truth, as he believed, could not be uttered. Yet at the same time, it cannot be denied that truth of his self-constitution. He finally manages to admit to Harper, "Forget about that. Just listen. You want the truth. This is the truth" (I: 77). He manages to recognize himself as apart form, and against, the burden of the tradition.

Harper is the victim of Joe's inability to speak the truth about himself. His attitude frames her in an absolutely dreadful position of living an illusion of a life. Not only is Joe's sexual orientation considered a sin among Mormons, making the believer feel guilt, the Unspoken denies a true existence that is based on a full-fledged self-realization. Therefore, by not being able to utter the truth with Joe, Harper is forced into an "inner exile." She takes solace in Valium-induced visions escaping her obvious pain and fear of life. As she maintains, "People who are lonely, people left alone, sit talking nonsense to the air, imagining ...beautiful systems dying, old fixed orders spiraling apart... [...] But everywhere, things are collapsing, lies surfacing, systems of defense giving way ... This is why, Joe, this is why I shouldn't be left alone" (I: 16-17). Yet even in her Valium-sedated state she identifies Joe's responsibility: "And if I do have emotional problems it's from living with you" (I: 27), "Or if you do think I do then you should never have married me. You have all these secrets and lies" (I: 27). By not speaking out Joe denied the existence of his feelings, which backfired and forced both to lead their lives in the shadow of the Unspoken.

Nevertheless, in one of her hallucinations, Harper meets Prior and each of them is, at least in the hallucination, capable of uttering the essential "missing piece" in the puzzle of truth. Prior tells Harper that "Your husband's a homo" (I: 33), whereas she reveals to him that "Deep inside you, there's a part of you, that most inner part, entirely free of disease" (I: 34).

Significantly, the main characteristics of the world in *Millennium Approaches* are its opacity and murkiness caused by the absence of truth. The protagonists live completely skewed relationships because they cannot utter the Word and, through this,

speak the truth. Their entire existences rely on verbal exchange. Harper is left speaking to herself, that is a "dialogue" turned inwards. In her hallucinations she dreams about an interlocutor: "God won't talk to me. I have to make up people to talk to me" (I: 40). She tries to escape into her imagination where she meets the people she has invented. Yet since hallucinations cannot be completely severed form reality, she ends up meeting Joe in them as well. His presence in her hallucinations, because of her conviction that he should have never married her, is unsettling for her, to say the least. Not fully aware of his presence in her delusions, she feels insecure and frightened. In the moment of revelation between both characters it is Joe who finally figures this out:

Joe: As long as I've known you Harper you've been afraid of … of men hiding under the bed, men hiding under the sofa, men with knives.

[…]

Joe: Who are these men? I never understood it. Now I know.

Harper: What?

Joe: It's me. (I: 79)

It was him, his destructive silence that made him produce nothing but lies and had such a ruinous effect on Harper. Joe married Harper following tradition, yet he was not able to give her anything more. He was not able to live the life he wanted because he was not able to speak it aloud and thus make it happen. Since he could not utter the word his desires could not come even close to the surface of reality. And, lastly, because he had not spoken the word, he cut the life-line necessary for his and Harper's self-realization.

Millennium Approaches abounds in examples of the characters' ontological dependence on the spoken Word, dialogue and physical presence. The vast majority of them, with the exception of Louis, rely on the verbal acknowledgement of their respective situations. This, in turn, can only happen in a form of a dialogue. The verbal identification cannot happen in solitude. Through the reply one learns about oneself and elevates oneself to the level of self-realization.[17] This self-identifying communication, in order to further provide the basis for the re-cognition, has to remain dialogical and should

not develop into a dialectical spiral. Its purpose is not primarily to increase the knowledge and scope of information but, rather, to offer an insight into oneself. With this condition, it becomes a process directed towards oneself and less to the other person. Yet for the normal functioning of this cognition one cannot do without an interlocutor. If, as in Harper's case, this is not possible, these characters seek out substitute ways to deal with and attain at least some level of self-realization. They either talk to themselves or spend their days in a haze of drug-induced imaginary world. This dialogic form of existence is essentially conditioned by another, more deeply seated human condition, that has been best described by Lévinasian "ethical subjectivity." Ethics as *protè sophía* defines human beings as necessarily oriented towards the other, as essentially malfunctioning without the other. It is through the dialogue that subjectivity can be understood, Lévinas points out: "comme acueillant Autrui, comme hospitalité" (xv). It is through the entrance of the other into the self that self-realization as truth is reached.

As it has become obvious, for the protagonists of *Millennium Approaches* the attitude towards the Word is absolutely essential. Yet they do not live it but are forced into terrible and hopeless existence without any prospect of resolution. Since only dialogue reveals the essence of the self, they cannot live proper lives. Living in the shadow of self-oblivion they cannot find means of escaping their predicament. Necessarily, such existences spiral into annihilation. They all remain entangled in self-destructive patterns depsite Kushner's use of deus ex machina at the end of the cycle of plays.

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[17] This may be seen as a perfect example of a Heraclitean maxim to "know thyself".

6. Conclusion

The main impetus that initiated this investigation was to probe the (in)famous statement about the death of tragedy and the current unfavourable scholarly disposition toward other concepts that had been considered seminal to the genre. Tragedy, it is correct to say, maintained a unique position among all literary genres: it was the first to be codified, and for the longest time philosophers and playwrights have been debating the primacy of its essence or appearance. Needless to say, Aristotle's intervention dominated through the amalgamation of the genre with more fundamental issues such as philosophy of deed and ethics. This meant that appearance alone ceased to be privileged. Aristotle placed tragedy in a middle ground between deeds and ethics, endowing it with seeming permanence. Although there have been many engagements with tragedy in different periods of history, none has had such an influence as its treatment by Hegelian dialectics. What began as a rejection of an enclosed system and its key factor, the subject, resulted in undermining the foundation of tragedy. This was the same notion of subjectivity that has been since Descartes the factor most heavily relied upon. The apogee of this stance was artistically reached during high Modernism and also poststructuralist theory. The following artistic period, Postmodernism, appears to have already successfully relegated the absolute values and traditional issues to the past. As a result of such completely relativistic artistic currents, tragedy appears to have become unnecessary and obsolete.

As history has taught us, old concepts are never completely eradicated, although they might be forgotten for a time. Such has been the case with tragedy. My initial presupposition was that either the evaluative measures have not been up-to-date or the genre has changed so much that it could not be grasped by using the old theoretical tools. Both assumptions have been proved correct to a point. A reconsideration of these two elements has demonstrated the survival of tragedy today.

In the first chapter, my aim was to investigate the inadequacy of the present theory of tragedy for an analysis of the genre's contemporary forms. The first problem appeared to be the exegesis of Aristotelian theory of tragedy. His Renaissance and Neo-classicist followers established his *Poetics* as the one and only model for the genre,

rendering what was meant as a descriptive treatise into a normative set of laws valid for all times. As I demonstrate in the example of catharsis, it is impossible to view it outside the particular socio-cultural values of ancient Greece that provided the necessary link between the audience, its values, and the substance of the tragic representation. In further discussion I touched upon another issue that fell prey to absolutization: the relationship between art and life, tragedy and myth. Seen as inextricably intertwined, these two concepts have further entrenched the absolute characteristics of tragedy.

Yet changes in human history widened the gap between the norms associated with Aristotle's *Poetics* and dramatic representations that continued to depict tragedy. This ever-widening gap led to declarations about the death of tragedy. The incompatibility of the rules of tragedy and the transformations in society resulted in the introduction of new genres such as tragicomedy, bourgeois tragedy, liberal tragedy, to name a few. As I have argued and demonstrated, the nature of tragedy must be assessed in relation only to the situation and the conditions depicted and not as a static form.

In the second chapter I scrutinized the changes of the tragic genre. Instead of examining the previously-established parameters of tragedy, I decided to investigate its essential component that synecdochically stands for and influences the entire genre, i.e. the concept of the subject in its dramatic form of a character, the protagonist. I underscored the fundamental parameters of the development of the concept, first as it was in antiquity or, better yet, as it was perceived to have been in ancient Greece, and as it developed through time.

In my study of the tragic character, I also examined the German Idealist philosophers' reflections on this issue. In the philosophy of tragedy that developed during this period, a strong bond was formed between the idealist perception of the subject and the seemingly absolute Attic perspective. Because Idealism was essential in creating a full-fledged philosophy of tragedy, it is not surprising that these qualities became the norm for understanding the tragic subject. Such a norm is, for example, the tragic hero's public character as well as its public function. Nonetheless, I argue that Idealism, having been the last philosophical current with absolute tendencies, created its own self-contained system that had few references to real life. As I have demonstrated in my analysis, subjectivity perceived in this totalizing manner was not conducive to

understanding the autonomous subjects of the modern era. That idealist subjectivity cannot be applied to the further development of the concept became apparent in the intense critique of the speculative philosophy, by Hegel in particular.

To elucidate this critique I have turned to three key philosophers of free will, autonomous subject, and existential self-sufficiency: Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard. What they accomplished in the philosophical realm, another theoretician and playwright, Hebbel, fulfilled in the realm of tragedy. His contribution to the modern comprehension of drama has been too frequently neglected. Hebbel transformed the essential notion of conflict in tragedy. He pointed out that modern conflicts are not between the protagonist and the external world, but rather within him or herself. The hero can legitimately claim that he/she represents an entire universe in him/herself.

As we have seen, this new understanding of subjectivity has not readily translated into the acceptance of the continued existence of tragedy. To better relate this new subjectivity to the genre, I drew upon Lévinas's insights on the shift from ontology to deontology, i.e. ethics. Lévinas's formulations open up a new space within which to see the subject as exclusively in reference to him/herself, but rather necessarily engaged with the other. This relation between the self and other is best represented by dialogue, returning us to the proper domain of tragedy and re-establishing a link between subjectivity and universality. The relationship with the other has to be in continuous motion in order to keep the self, as a universal being, ceaselessly in check. Contrary to the dialectical process, where the evolution was seen as *geistesgeschischtlich*, that is, linked with the spirit of time and the positive progress of history, here the movement is binary, constantly swaying between the two opposite poles. This constant movement best reconciles the gap between the traditional and the poststructuralist theories of the subject and establishes a post-deconstructive subjective entity.

Within this paradigm it is possible to place modern and contemporary conflicts that fulfill tragedy's two essential conditions of being unavoidable and irresolvable, thus constituting true tragedies. I have demonstrated what I have developed on the conceptual level through my analysis of tragedies in the final chapter of my dissertation.

The heroes of the plays I have studied could be classified according to the "laws" for a post-deconstructive subjectivity. They are all conscious protagonists who knowingly

venture into a conflict. Moreover, all four underscore the necessary conditions for a new contemporary tragedy that supports my claim that tragedy has indeed survived. Today tragedy retains its double character, symbolic (totalizing) on the one hand and synecdochical (particularizing) on the other. Therefore, tragedy can still refer to the general, *a priori* concept encapsulated in the traditional form of the genre, yet it can also pertain to each and every singular case it represents. In other words, tragedy has retained the essential qualities of the past and remained essential to contemporary reality as well. Tragedy caters to both hermeneutical pathways: the universal, which links the genre with the tragicality of life, and the singular, which, in turn, advocates the tragic in an individual existence. Therefore, as Szondi would have it, there is "kein Zweifel, daß unter den Denkern minderen Ranges [...] die meisten auf der richtigen Spur waren, auch wenn ihre Theorien des Tragischen meist nicht zu trennen sind von einer "pantragischen" Betrachtung der Welt, die mehr autobiographisch denn philosophisch ist."[1] The theoretical approach to tragedy that emphasized the absolute values proved inefficient with regard to contemporary tragedy. However, as I have argued in this thesis, the experience of the subject of tragedy, as individual as it may be, still relates to a larger, in fact, universal understanding.

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[1] Szondi 59.

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